NF

ISSUE #52: PHOTOGRAPHY IN FOCUS

POKÉMON LEGENDS: **ARCEUS**

SPLATOON 3

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD

THE FATE OF **FATAL FRAME**

MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH

MONSTER HUNTER RISE

PERSONA 5 STRIKERS

PERIPHERAL VISION: **GAME BOY CAMERA**

BRAVELY DEFAULT II

INTERVIEW: **BRANDON HILL**

POKÉMON **BRILLIANT DIAMOND & SHINING PEARL**

MAY/ JUNE 2021

PICTURES OF THE PAST

THE BACK CATALOG recovery project, after a brief hiatus, has resumed once more. Our immediate goal, as a reminder, is to make every NF issue we've ever published available to own in print form in perpetuity — meaning that once they've sold through their initial print runs, they're shifted over to print-on-demand availability. It's pricier to print legacy issues one at a time, of course, so this is really only for hardcore completionist collectors. But if that's you, we've got three more additions to the lineup ready to roll.

First up, in celebration of the continuing content additions to the unstoppable original Shovel Knight (see Page 12 for more on that), we've got our first Shovel Knight issue back in rotation again. See where the Blue Burrower's story began with NF Issue #7: New Beginnings!

Next, Father's Day is coming around again, so consider turning back the clock seven years to our Father's Day-themed Issue #9: Where Have All the Fathers Gone? from May/June 2014. (You know, I never have taken advantage of my status as a Dad and donned a top hat, à la Professor Layton. I should correct that oversight immediately.)

Finally, because Nintendo has just revealed the existence of Splatoon 3 (see Page 28 for our first look at that), we certainly need to make sure that anyone who wants to own our previous Splatoon issues is able to do so. Issue #15, with Splatoon 1 on the cover, has remained available since it was first published. The Splatoon 2-themed Issue #27, though, sold through its stock a while back. So now, it's back! Dive in, why don't you? **— LUCAS**

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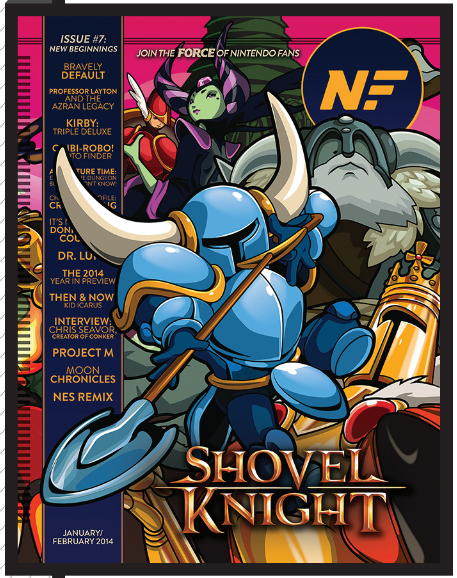


ISSUE #7:
NEW BEGINNINGS

ISSUE #9:
WHERE HAVE ALL
THE FATHERS
GONE?

ISSUE #27:
WHEN TWO
IS BETTER
THAN ONE

Only a few more solo issues to go . . . and then get ready for something new on the horizon!

ISSUE #52:
PHOTOGRAPHY
IN FOCUS

CONTENTS

INBOX 4

NEWS 8

DOWNLOAD 14

COMICS 25, 39, 54, 60, 64, 81

PREVIEWS 26

FEATURES 40

RETRO 55

INTERVIEW 61

REVIEWS 65

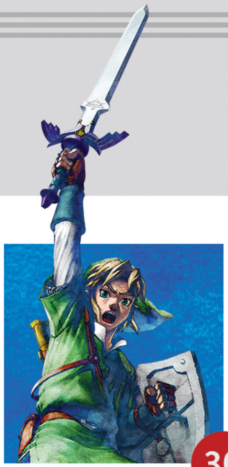
COMMUNITY 78

NEXT ISSUE 82

36

26

33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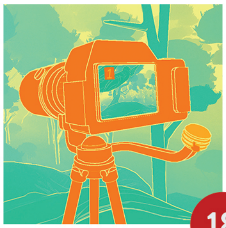
14

40

38

16


18

32

29

66

28

61

59

79

70

ON THE COVER

For this photography-focused NF edition, we've got a front cover first: an actual photograph! You're already familiar with the work of professional photographer Brandon Hill whether you know it or not, as his incredible images have passed under your eyes several times over the years. But here, Brandon composed a brand-new collage for our cover that celebrates the journey from the original Pokémon Snap to its all-new sequel! Be sure to check out our interview with Brandon beginning on Page 61.

57

INBOX

SAY “CHEESE!”

It’s here! It’s real! After waiting for over two decades for it to finally appear, an honest-to-goodness actual sequel to the N64 fan favorite Pokémon Snap has arrived at long last. And we’re in the mood to mark the moment!

One of the driving forces behind Nintendo Force, you’ve surely noticed, is contextualizing new releases by painting a picture of the past that led up to their launch – timelines, chronologies, history features. It’s kind of our thing. But New Pokémon Snap has no direct history to recount. It’s just the second game in its series . . . you couldn’t even call Snap a series until now! So how do we look back on the two decades of nothing between the two installments?

We follow the photography.

Snap might not have been active through the ’00s and ’10s, but its core concept of fusing together video games and photography absolutely endured. So our central feature this time around is "The Path to New Pokémon Snap," looking back on how cameras have continued to creep into gaming over the decades – both virtually, as in Snap, as well as in reality, when built into new generations of hardware!

We’ve got other photo-focused content in support as well, of course, including a double Peripheral Vision retrospective on both the Game Boy Camera and Printer, an interview with professional photographer Brandon Hill and a look ahead to the Switch release of the unique photo-snapping indie game, Umurangi Generation.

All those flashbulbs going off didn’t blind us from our usual duties, though, so we’ve got reviews of major recent releases like Persona 5 Strikers, Bravely Default II, Monster Hunter Rise and The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV. And New Pokémon Snap isn’t the only trip to Pikachu’s world we’ll take, as you can check out our first looks at the upcoming Pokémon Legends: Arceus, as well as the long-awaited Sinnoh remakes, Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl!

Here’s hoping this issue’s content inspires you to smile your most picture-perfect smile!

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #51:
MARCH/APRIL 2021

Thank you all once again for the outpouring of positive feedback for our last issue! It was definitely weirder than usual for us, kind of experimental in a way, but that only seemed appropriate since we were putting the weird and experimental Suda51 in the spotlight! Our No More Heroes III coverage will continue next time, as it isn’t due to drop until August, so we’ve got a while before we need to circle back around to it.

In the meanwhile let’s circle back to the Player’s Poll questions we printed in NF #47! They were Pokémon Snap-related, including "Did you play the original?" and "What Pokémon do you want to see in the sequel?". We also wanted to know which other long dormant series you’d revive next, and finally whether or not you regularly play old games or mostly just stick to new releases. Here we go:

LETTERS

I’ve only ever seen Pokémon Snap played once in my life, but it could have been Hey You, Pikachu! for all I know. I really only got to sit and watch my friends play their N64, so I never got a chance to get my hands on it to make sure. I’m really excited to get to explore a new side of Pokémon where they’re just being Pokémon doing whatever and interacting with the world. Those are some of the moments I absolutely enjoy in the anime. It’s nice to get to see the more natural side and it makes them feel a lot more real.

I hope I get to see some of the more musical Pokémon perform songs. I want to see a production with Rillaboom, Kricketune, Toxtricity and a whole choir of Meloetta perform with Ludicolo dancing. I also wouldn’t mind getting to see a Sawsbuck and Deerling change their coats, or a Mr. Mime pantomiming like it was taking photos too! I feel like there is so much more to explore and I can’t wait to find it all! **– BEN W.**

I think that bringing back Hey You, Pikachu! would be so much fun with the advancements in voice recognition and A.I. learning.

I still regularly play old games. Depends what mood I’m in or if I have people over. It’s so much easier to boot up Mario Party or Goldeneye on the 64 than it is to find a four-player game on something newer.

I have played the original Pokémon Snap – and I ended up bringing it back out after the announcement of the sequel just to see how much I could remember! **– TOMAZ BOWERS**

There is not enough space in all the pages of every issue of NF Magazine to allow my full list of what series should be brought back in some form. So I’ll just leave a link to my spreadsheet instead, but say I would do unspeakable things for a new Tomato Adventure.
– ZACHARY CZARNECKI
Let the record state that Zachary actually did provide a link to a spreadsheet that was filled with roughly 1,000 different video game series names. Seriously.

I’d love to see an F-Zero for the Switch. I think that could be stunning visually and be a total blast online. The series hasn’t seen a release in a few years either. **– ALEX C.**
17 years now. But who’s counting?

F-Zero has been dormant way too long, it’s long overdue for a new sequel, something all us F-Zero fans (myself included) have been begging for since the Wii. For a while Shigeru Miyamoto said there’s no good reason to keep the series going; there’s no more they could do to evolve it. But then in mid-2015 when NX rumors started to become a thing I heard somewhere that Miyamoto made the statement that F-Zero will have a future on the NX. So like the folks still waiting for Pikmin 4, I’m waiting on that announcement of a new F-Zero for Switch. **– EMERY COOK**
OK, Emery’s probably counting.

Can Kirby Air Ride count as a dormant series? If so, I’d love to see a modern rendition of that. Otherwise, I think I’d

FROM WART TO TRAVIS

After a long absence I have recently started to get back into video games, and I feel that there is no better way to show this than snapping a picture of my first issue of Nintendo Power beside my first issue of Nintendo Force. Thank you for your magazine. **— MICHAEL SCORZETTI**

And thank you for the photo, and for deciding to jump into becoming an NF subscriber!

Seeing those two issues next to each other drives home how far we've come – Nintendo Power has been powered down for nearly eight and a half years now, but its legacy is still living on! I can imagine that the gamers of 1988 would have loved a character like Travis Touchdown. Beating down aliens with both a beam sword and wrestling moves? Radical!

like to see a new Advance Wars game! Days of Ruin was so good, and it's disappointing that they left it at that.

I seek out older games as I hear about them, usually by way of getting shown them by my boyfriend, who grew up on the NES and SNES. It's important to play old games and see where your favorite franchises started!

Never did play the original Pokémon Snap – none of my friends or myself had a N64. I'm very excited to play the new installment, though! It's always looked like such a fun game, and I'm a photographer in real life as well, so I can't help but be excited for games where I get to be one! **— SARAH JONES**

This issue's just for you, Sarah!

I love playing old games! I started with the NES and still play and collect both retro and modern titles. I actively seek out both old and new releases. It constantly boggles my mind how many games I've missed out on playing on so many systems I currently own. They're called hidden gems for a reason!

I played and still have the original Pokémon Snap and the Player's Guide to go with it. I spent hours on that game with my brother and cousins – looking back it was so simple, yet we would spend weeks just trying to figure out how to photograph the Snorlax or a Scyther. It was always really satisfying once you found out and snagged the picture. I'm definitely interested in playing the new installment – as an old-school fan I'd love to see Pokémon from both the Kanto and Johto regions included, but I'd also like to see some from Galar and other newer regions as well. Either way, it's been long overdue and is gonna be a lot of fun to play! **— MATT SIMONE**

As someone who has been playing games since the NES, I have seen multiple series stop showing up as new generations of systems release. The one I most want to see get a revival is the Ogre Battle series. I didn't play the original SNES game, but I remember reading about it in Nintendo Power and being very interested. I got the N64 game, Person of Lordly Caliber, and it remains one of my favorite games of all time. Great RPG elements, artwork, story . . . it had everything! I also picked up the GBA Tactics Ogre game, and I'd even be OK if that was the way the series went, because "tactics" games are still popular and I just want to return to the world of ogres, Deneb the Witch and all the other greats of this series. **— ANDREW WILEY**

Golden Sun, hands down. This is one of my most favorite series besides Zelda. I named my son Isaac, for crying out loud! The first two games were close to perfection and the third has left me wanting more. If they were to revive this series I might literally cry. **— BEN ABRESCH**

Isaac is a good, subtle game-referencing baby name. Harder to hide your inspiration if you call your kid Ganondorf.

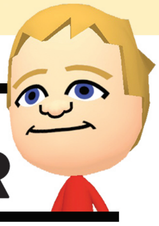
Of course I played the original Pokémon Snap! My cousins and I spent hours bonking Pokémon on the head with apples and those things, what were they, smoke balls? (Was never quite sure what they were.) We would get really excited when we figured stuff out, like knocking that Charmeleon into the lava to turn him into Charizard (sorry for the 20+ years spoiler). I am so looking forward to playing the new Pokémon Snap. I wish I had the game right now. I hope they include Surfing Pikachu in the game, as a tribute to the original! **— BINYAMIN ABERBACH**

My headcanon is that Pokémon Snap's original Surfing Pikachu evolved into the new Alolan Raichu that surfs in the sequel!

I think a new Ice Climber would be nice. Maybe emphasizing co-op, like Popo and Nana in Smash Bros. **— JULIO CABRERA**

Yes! Exactly! Where's Ice Climber 2, Nintendo?!

CARTER'S CORNER



Hey! Have you seen our Super Mario Odyssey speedrun on YouTube? The one where I work with my Dad to beat Bowser? If so, then another one is coming your way! I'm planning to do another without my Dad's help! I don't know when I'll do it, but probably sometime in the month of May. It'll be a Super MAYrio Speedrun!

The speedrun includes skipping the Hariet battle in Sand Kingdom, no Multi Moon at the Festival, no Torkdrift and only 124 Power Moons needed. I might even play in a different language! Ikou! (That's "Let's go!" in Japanese.) Also look forward to Impossible 3, Pom Poms, and even Sand Kingdom 2.

Lastly, let's play another guessing game. What is my favorite kingdom? Also, what's my least favorite kingdom? I'll tell you next time! Also, look at my Bowser's Fury photos on Page 76.

Hats off!

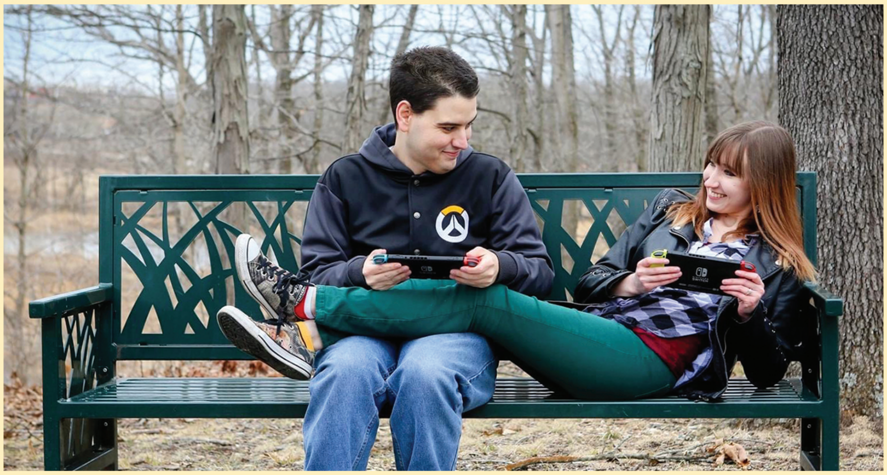
PHOTO SUBMISSIONS!

In our last Player's Poll, we didn't ask for written responses. We sought photos instead! We received a wide array of images of game collections, custom creations and . . . an engagement shoot?! Take a look!

- KURT PRENGER

- BENJAMIN HILTY

- JOHN NADEAU



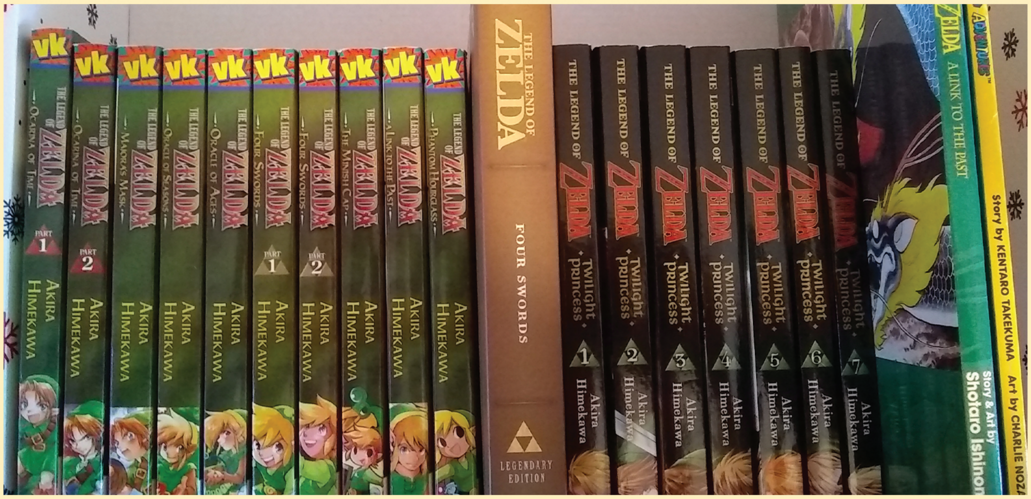
- MR. JOHN & MRS. JORDAN KNUDSEN

- MATT MASON

- ZACHARY HARRIS

- MIKE P.

- JONATHAN B. MERIDA



- RAYMOND HENSHAW

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Mr. John & Mrs. Jordan Knudsen**, the winners of last issue's Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to here your thoughts about The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword!

QUESTION #1

Have you played The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword before, at some time in the last 10 years? If so, what was the high point of the time you spent with it? And what was the low point?

QUESTION #2

Skyward Sword served as the magnum opus of Nintendo's era of motion controls. What are your thoughts on how it handled on Wii? And what is your opinion of motion controls in games in general?

QUESTION #3

Imagine that Skyward Sword got some kind of Bowser's Fury-esque extra game mode attached to its new Switch port. What would it be like? Who would be the star, and how would it play?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #53" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a copy of the new Skyward Sword HD!

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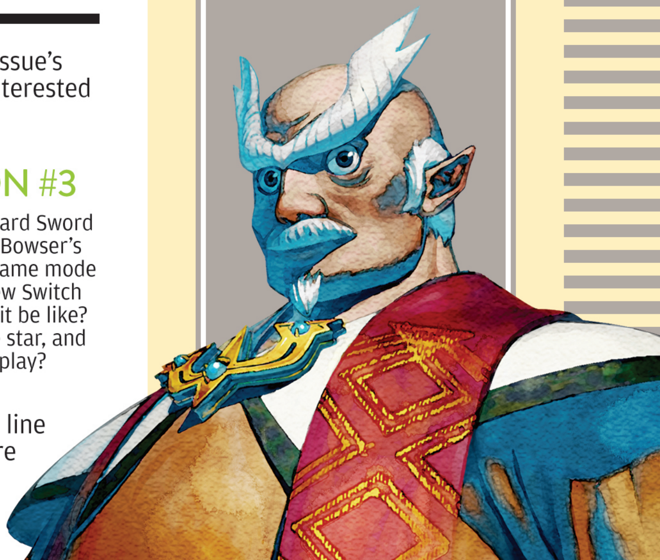


NEWS

No-Show on Pro, but Blue is New

Rumors continue to swirl about what the next Switch will be.

EAGER NINTENDO FANS hungry for news about the next revision of the Switch hardware did get a hardware announcement in April: The Nintendo Switch Lite will now be available in a snazzy blue!

(OK, it looks great. But it wasn't the reveal we were hoping for.)

Yes, the long-rumored "Switch Pro" is still a creature of mystery. But, that said, three recent totally new rumors have been added to the ongoing saga and have kept our interest piqued.

First, below, take a look at a couple of recently unearthed patent illustrations – it seems that one idea in the mix for a future Switch is introducing a flexible new Joy-Con that bends in the middle. To increase comfort, perhaps? It's not the first issue I'd think to fix with a new generation of Joy-Con, but hey. Potentially cool.

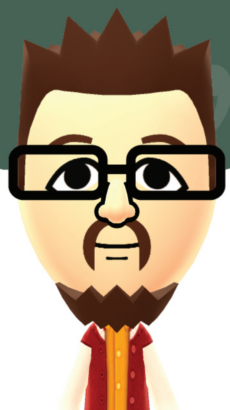
Next, Bloomberg has reported that Samsung will be manufacturing and supplying a new 7-inch OLED display for Nintendo. The current size of the handheld Switch screen is 6.2 inches on the diagonal, which doesn't seem like a big difference, but it would be paired with a big shift on the TV: 4K.

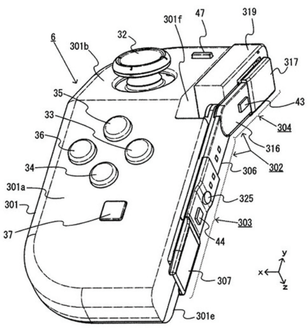
That's the third new rumor, and it's being backed up by Bloomberg again via a second report that states that Nvidia will supply a new chip for this next Switch that facilitates the bump up in television display resolution by employing DLSS. That stands for Deep Learning Super Sampling, and it's a method by which less powerful processors can still kind of "fake" their way to outputting 4K images.

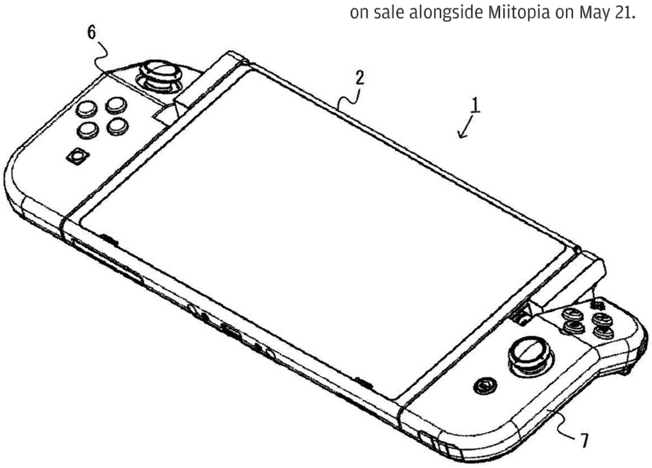
Nothing's confirmed yet, but it really feels like we're getting closer!

In the meanwhile, there's that new, blue Switch Lite to tide us over. It'll go on sale alongside Miitopia on May 21.

> Why is it taking so long for Nintendo to reveal a more powerful Switch? It could be that they've wanted to, but the pandemic forced them to push back their plans. It could be that they've watched the standard and Lite Switches sell like crazy and haven't wanted to damage that momentum. It could be that it just hasn't been ready for the spotlight yet! Hopefully we'll see it soon! – **LUCAS**







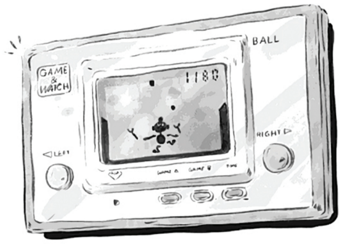
A New Overview

The "Who Was?" series takes on Nintendo.

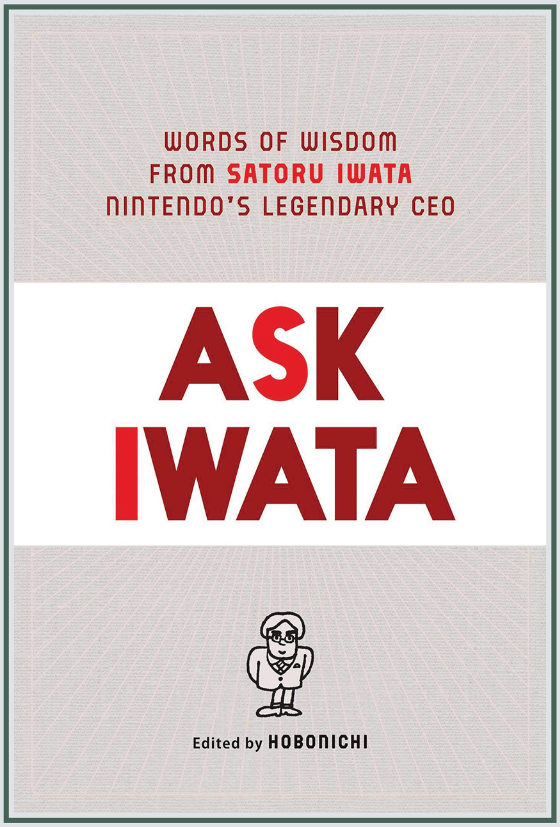
WHO WAS GANDHI? What Was the Berlin Wall? Where Is the Grand Canyon? Since 2002, the "Who Was?" book series has been tackling topics like that, introducing kids to famous figures, places and events in human history. And now "What Is Nintendo?" has joined the lineup!

First published in January and written by Gina Shaw, What Is Nintendo? offers an easily readable overview of the complete history of the company, going all the way back to 1889 and tracing its journey to today. Illustrations support the text, and while not everything inside is 100% accurate, I still recommend it for young readers! **— LUCAS**

The first Game & Watch game was *Ball*, and it was sold around the world. Gunpei had done it! The Game & Watch was a major success.



Game & Watch game called *Ball*



Satoru Speaks

Mr. Iwata's book is now available in English.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING that offers a little more depth than just a general review of Nintendo history? Here's the book for you: the newly translated Ask Iwata.

Available in Japan since 2019, Ask Iwata is now on sale in English thanks to a translation by Sam Bett at VIZ Media. It launched on April 13 and is available in both digital and hardcover physical form.

The book is kind of a cobbled-together collection of writings. Satoru Iwata never wanted to write a book while he was still alive, the preface explains, so this isn't a wholly cohesive autobiography or anything like that.

Rather, the bulk of the book is filled with freshly translated articles that Mr. Iwata wrote for the website of the Japanese publication Hobo Nikkan Itoi Shinbun over the course of several years. Also known as Hobonichi, the "Almost Daily Itoi Newspaper" started out as the personal website of EarthBound creator Shigesato Itoi before growing into a major company. Itoi and Iwata were great friends in addition to being game industry colleagues, so plenty of their personal friendship shines through in the writings contained here.

Some material from the "Iwata Asks" series of developer interviews is included as well, and that's of course where the book found the inspiration for its English title.

Mr. Iwata passed away in July 2015 — he's been gone nearly six years now. I'm happy this book will help keep his memory alive! **— LUCAS**

Another Chance to Catch the Koopalings

Wendy, Roy, Morton, Lemmy, Iggy, Larry and Ludwig are all getting restocked in plushie form.

THE SAN-EI PLUSH versions of the Koopalings were wildly popular back when they released in 2013. Their unboxing is my most popular YouTube video! In the 7+ years they've been available, they've been rampantly faked by counterfeiters. When you shop, if the listing doesn't say Little Buddy or San-ei, they're counterfeit. In fact, I'd advise skipping Amazon and Walmart for plush sales, as both have unchecked third-party sellers that are most likely bootleggers. Little Buddy is the localization arm of San-ei in North America, and you may have seen several Mario plushes in Target stores. If your Roy has a cannon, your Morton has a hammer or your Lemmy has a ball, they're fake! The others are harder to tell, and there's a recent batch of counterfeits that are much closer to the originals. The official plushes were originally sold at around $20 each, and I'm seeing those prices again under Little Buddy and the Japanese re-release. Watch your purchases!

The Bounty Hunter's Headgear

Celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Metroid series by bringing home Samus Aran's iconic helmet!

SINCE SHE'S STILL waiting to be called into action for Metroid Prime 4, Samus has no need for her helmet right now. So why not buy it off her? First 4 Figures has replicated this iconic headgear in the form of a resin statue. The helmet is from the Varia Suit, and its stand mimics the save stations of the original Metroid Prime. There are two editions: One is sold in stores and one is exclusively on the F4F website. The exclusive version comes with LED lights in the visor and the base, illuminating the whole piece for a more cinematic feel. The piece will retail at $534.99, and just by the heft of that price tag you can get an idea of the weight of the statue, which is nearly 20 pounds. After all, it stands 19 inches tall and is made of resin! The release date is set at Q1 2022, which is more aggressive than some of First 4 Figures' other recent efforts. The edition size is to be determined, as they don't release that info until pre-orders are closed.

BY BRETT MARTIN

A Quartet of Cats

These are some fine-looking felines, to be sure.

THERE HAVE BEEN plushes released of the Super Mario gang in their cat suits already – Cat Mario, Cat Luigi, Cat Toad, Cat Peach and Cat Rosalina all have plush representation – but they're also plushes San-ei made in 2013. At the Nintendo Tokyo store, a new set for the release of Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury has recently appeared. (While that game is not specifically branded on the box, its release did coincide with the game's release.) Shoppers could get a discount on the plush set when they bought the game. The set dumps Rosalina but features new patterns for the four original characters. It's around $65 for the set, or a little over $15 if you want to buy any of them separately. Some proxy services can order things from the Nintendo Tokyo online store and ship them to you, and aside from inflated auctions, it's the only way to get the exclusive items.

It Comes in Pints!?

Quench the most monstrous of thirsts.

FANGAMER HAS A storied history of bringing out merchandise options for games that might not otherwise receive merchandise. They started by making unlicensed goods – some of which are still available today. They were so good at it that they grew to include licensed goods that are some of the most unique and high quality items on the video game merchandise market!

Somehow, after all these years, they continue to top themselves, and this Monster Hunter wooden tankard mug is proof. It has metal trim, and the drinking mug is removable and made from stainless steel for easy cleaning. The tankard was so popular that it sold out within 10 hours, but fear not: A restock is planned and Fangamer will hopefully announce details soon!

amiibo UPDATE

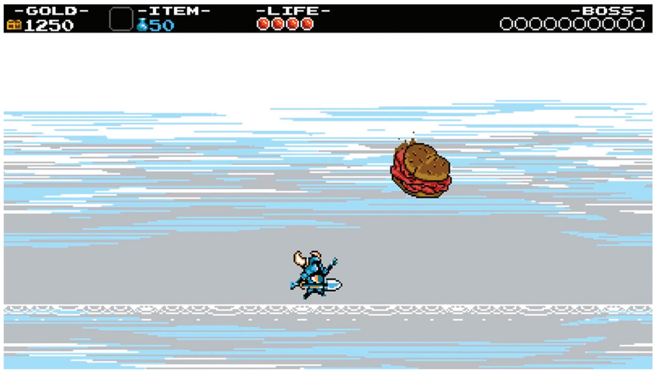
BANJO & KAZOOIE, Terry and Byleth all hit store shelves in March – then instantly flew off them. Target had a Hello Kitty/ Sanrio crossover with Animal Crossing cards, and the three different Monster Hunter Rise amiibo are also in homes now.

So what's next? Aside from the as-of-yet unannounced Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Fighters Pass 2 characters that have been promised, there are currently no other publicly announced plans for amiibo moving forward.

Will the re-release of Skyward Sword finally bring the Skyloft Link amiibo back into production? Will we see a "Link riding a Loftwing" amiibo? Just what is the lasting power of this toy line?

All I can tell you is that Nintendo items sell and tend to sell well, especially if there are real, assumed or manufactured limited quantities. None of us amiibo diehards will forget the stress of nabbing those early characters and all of the exclusive nonsense swirling around them. Did you wait in line? Did you stay up late, smashing the refresh button?

I still think it's amazing that some characters still have only their amiibo as their sole piece of available merchandise: Wolf, Captain Falcon, Wii Fit Trainer, Shulk, Duck Hunt, Richter, Byleth and Dark Samus all lay claim to this title. Even the Ice Climbers and Palutena really only have unpainted figures – or keshi – attributed to their merchandise list. I suppose the Mii Fighters would count as well. Min Min actually stands alone currently as the only character in the roster without a figure, but I'm sure that will be corrected. Here's to amiibo in 2021!



For Shovelry! . . . and Sandwiches?

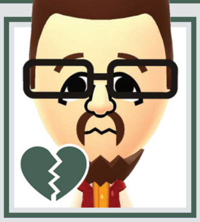
Shovel Knight crosses over with Arby's!? What a delicious idea!

WE'VE SEEN MARIO toys in McDonald's Happy Meals. We've witnessed Burger King promote Pokémon with golden trading cards. We even watched as Wendy's got in on the fun back in the Wii era, giving away tiny toy Wii Remotes alongside their kids' meals for a while. But not since the days of M.C. Kids and Yo! Noid has a Nintendo system seen a fusion of fast food and a famous game franchise actually play out in the game itself to this degree: Shovel Knight has joined forces with Arby's. And he went *all-in.*

Beginning on March 1, Arby's locations around the United States started including Shovel Knight-themed disc launcher toys in their kids' meals. But the toys were just an appetizer — the real meat was the cheat code printed on a little slip of paper alongside each one. Seven different cheat codes, actually, all of which cosmetically alter the Shovel Knight: Treasure Trove game to swap in some kind of Arby's-themed insanity.

Take **A&RBYEN**, for instance. If you enter that at the name screen (as with previous cheats), all the Beetos in the game will become roast beef sandwiches instead of bugs, and all the flying Propeller Rats will transform into straw-spinning milkshakes. **A&RBYKK** swaps King Knight's crown for the classic Arby's logo hat. **A&RBYBL** summons a roast beef fairy to hover alongside your hero for the whole quest; **A&RBSPK** replaces the health-restoring foods the Blue Burrower usually finds with Arby's lunches; **A&RBSHK** removes Shield Knight from the dream sequences in favor of yet another massive sandwich; **A&RBPLK** gives the heroes new food taunt moves and, finally, **A&RBYSK** is a text change that replaces all instances of "Shovel" and "Knight" with "Meat" instead. I think it's safe to say it: Shovel Knight. He has the meats! **— LUCAS**

Great!
Shovel Knight, from 2014, is still expanding in 2021!



Oh.
Now my tummy's rumbling.

BONUS! Use code **A&RBYS** to activate all the other codes' effects at the same time!

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

LAST TIME OUR March/April issue was headlined by a game that isn't due to debut until August, so this one is comparatively not nearly as severe: This is our May/June edition, but New Pokémon Snap will officially go on sale on April 30, 24 hours before May begins! We just couldn't pass up the opportunity to do a Pokémon Snap celebration issue, I hope you understand. See "The Path to New Pokémon Snap" beginning on Page 40!

GETTING INTO MAY properly, Nintendo is planning to present a double-header of incredible-looking 8-bit era remakes on May 14. We took a first look at these new Famicom Detective Club remakes back in NF #44, wondering if they'd get localized this time around. It turns out they are! And that inspired a new article starting on Page 16.

ONE WEEK LATER, May 21 will mark the release of Nintendo's next blast from the past: a re-release of Miitopia made fresh for the Switch. This RPG starring your choice of Miis first launched as a 3DS game a few years ago, and since Mii characters have faded from prominence in the Switch era, it wouldn't have been our first choice for a game to revive from that system. But could this be the beginning of a Mii comeback? See Page 32.

FASTER THAN A speeding bullet, the month of June will be here before you know it. And June 4 will host the launch of Nintendo's next big comic book brand collaboration: DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power! If you're a fan of the DC Universe, you'll definitely want to check out what they're cooking up for this one on Page 33.

IT'S FINALLY BACK! The Mario Golf series returns to a home console for the first time since 2003's Toadstool Tour with the all-new Switch-bound sequel, Super Rush, due to hit store shelves on June 25. I'm fully prepared to spend another long chunk of my summer months playing golf on my TV inside instead of heading out to an actual course in the outdoors somewhere! Prepare yourself too by reading Page 38.

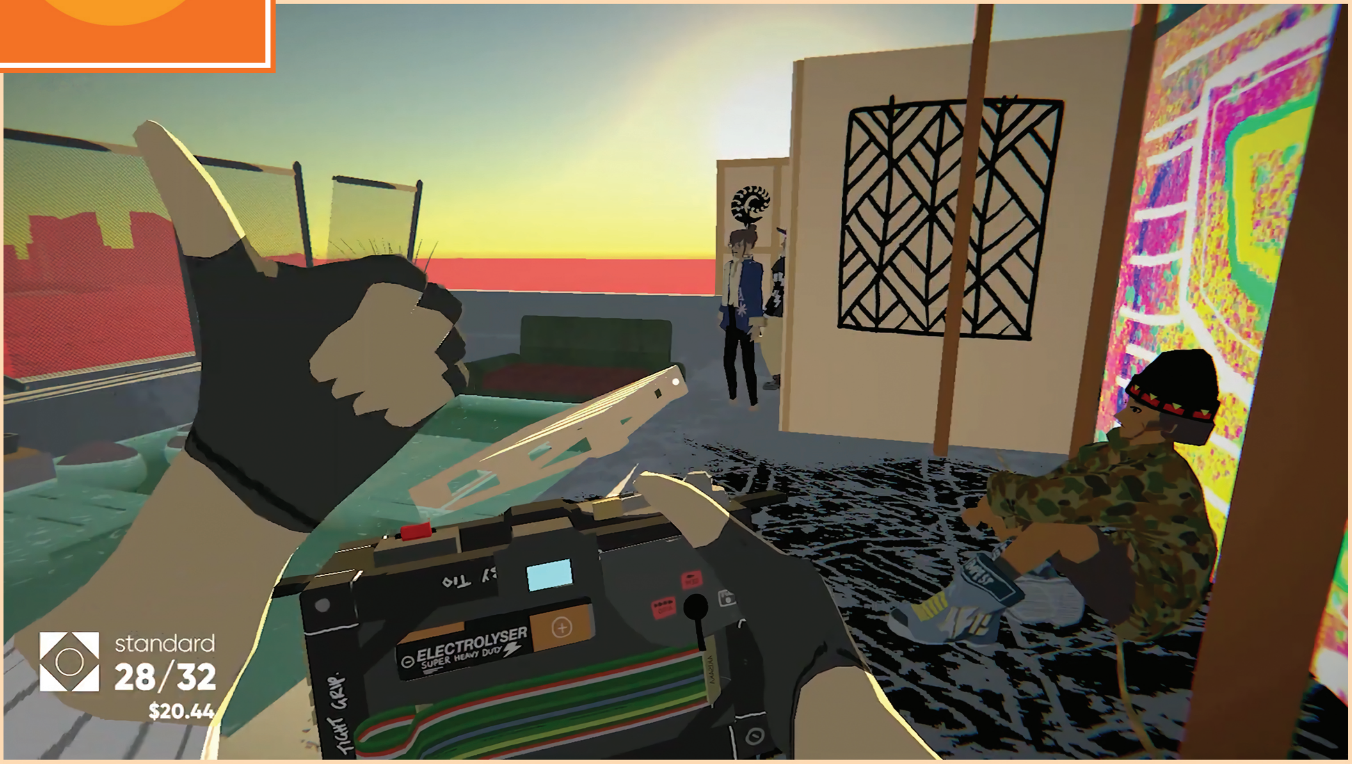
IT TOOK A couple of years, but the rumored HD re-release of The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword that we first reported on back in NF #38 has been officially unveiled at long last. Mr. Aonuma wasn't kidding at that concert after all! Set your sights to the sky and get ready to ride a Loftwing back up to Skyloft by reading our first preview on Page 30.

> A solid spring is setting up a sensational summer! Both New Pokémon Snap and Mario Golf: Super Rush are sequels I've been dreaming of for roughly two decades . . . and if I'd had any inkling that a revival of Famicom Detective Club would actually happen some day, I would have been awaiting that for roughly three! Meanwhile, it's only been one decade since I first played Skyward Sword. Ha! That's like no time at all! **— LUCAS**

NO NEW SMASH news to report as of this printing (though we've got our assessment of Pyra & Mythra ready for reading on Page 24), so let's give this spot to Nintendo Switch Online for a change. Its array of NES and SNES games has been slowly and steadily growing for two and a half years at this point, and while most of its recent updates have been met with criticism from Switch owners, I prefer to adopt a glass-half-full optimistic outlook.

There are over 110 unique games available in total now! It's a veritable smorgasbord of 8-bit and 16-bit hits . . . and misses. People complain because Nintendo's sending long-forgotten duds like Doomsday Warrior into the catalog next to the masterpieces like Super Metroid, but it's fun to spend an afternoon or two browsing through and sampling games that never would have earned your allowance decades ago.

Also, the full DKC trilogy is available now. Maybe I'll finally finish DKC3! (I never did in '96!)



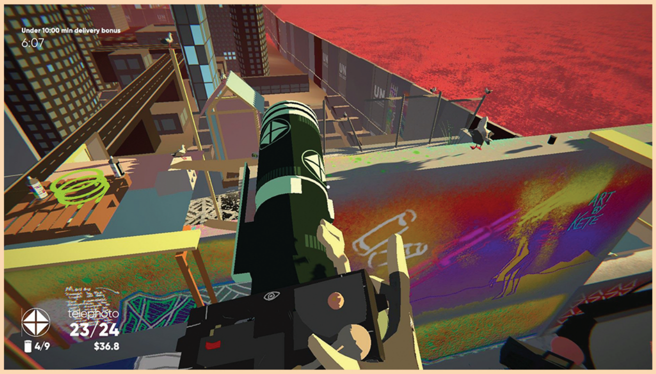
Photography in a Fractured Future

Take pictures as the apocalypse approaches in Umurangi Generation.

WE'RE ALL SMALL, but most of us try not to think about it. It's a little like living next to an airport – giant planes with huge, rumbling engines constantly fly overhead, filled with fuel that could explode at any instant. Yet, after a few months of living there, you don't even think about it. You don't hear the noise anymore. You just get on with your life. The environment, the government, all the other powers that be looming over our heads all day, every day, are like those jumbo jets, and chances are, you've gotten used to it.

But unless you see what's over your head, you're not going to be able to do anything about it. So how do you start to open your eyes? What's the best way to start looking at the big picture again? Well, like with most things, it's best to start small. In the case of the award-winning Umurangi Generation, that means taking pictures.

Developed by Naphtali Faulkner, a Māori person from New Zealand, the game starts off sweet and simple. You're a courier in a city, living in the near future, and you decide to take up freelance photography, all while talk of "giant monsters" and "the end of the world" swirls around you. The bulk of your time is spent wandering around in a non-violent space, taking in the sights and snapping snapshots. It's the kind of thing that might be a side mode in a AAA game like Fortnite or Breath of the Wild, but Faulkner was confident that giving players the right tools to express themselves would be enough to provide them with a full experience. He told us "Humans are inherently creative, and if you give them the opportunity to express that, they'll take it. I'm indigenous, but living in the West, I've learned that the structure of Western school systems is informed by how prisons were designed.



I believe it was Michel Foucault [a French philosopher] who said that. And I used to get in trouble in school, drawing on my books, and I'm probably not alone in that. But why is that? It's interesting, when people first play the game, they start with doing very prescriptive, by-the-numbers photos, but by the end, I've seen those same players taking pictures that aren't even a part of the objective anymore. They are just expressing their creativity. I think Breath of the Wild scratched that same itch. Same with Minecraft."

So at its core, Umurangi Generation is about discovering who you are, where you are and who you're with, all through breaking away from your routine ways of seeing things. If that sounds like a lot of work, don't worry! Everything about the game was designed to be fun and freeing.

"Pokémon Snap was an inspiration," Faulkner explained, "but I wanted to move away from that sort of 'crosshair photography,' from getting everything fully lined up in the center. Unless it's a passport photo or clinical medical photography, you don't do that. I get why it works with Pokémon Snap, where you're a nature photographer creating a catalog, but with street photography, it's more about creative intuition. Having moments where you feel something, try it, then say to yourself, 'Wow, I would have never thought of that.' But you did, because you taught yourself how."

He's still aware that you need some limitations, though.

"One of the objectives is always to take a picture of your friends, and you can't just take the same photo over and over again, but mostly, we wanted to be really hands-off for people who have had their creativity suppressed. Pictures are judged on things like if they're colorful or moody. If your photo has less color, then the game may categorize it as moody, and then give you more points for it if it has no color at all, and vice versa. It sees what you're trying to do, then rewards you from moving away from the middle of the road."

While he's restrained himself from adding too many new elements to the Switch port (he's keeping a lot of them to himself for a potential sequel), he couldn't help but use the new platform as an opportunity to explore. He told us Nintendo Land on the Wii U was actually a big inspiration for the new features in the Switch version, stating, "I don't think Nintendo gets that Nintendo may have saved the home console industry three times now, with the disruptions they brought to the market with NES, the Wii and now the Switch. Nintendo fans get that, and they get that change is good. They have taken to motion controls in ways others might not have, particularly gyro aiming, and I definitely want to lean into that. I get the feeling that in-game photos taken on Switch are going to look way more natural and organic than on the PC."

His love for the Wii U felt so strong that I had to ask, if the Wii U was still around, would he have considered porting the game there too? He laughed and said, "Well technically the Wii U is still around!" before expounding on how the system's ". . . dual screen setup offers unique opportunities that no other console has. It might have been perfect for the Tripod Mode that was left on the cutting room floor, but it was just like an extended selfie so we dropped it. With the Wii U, though, you could pass the camera around to friends, which would be awesome. So maybe we'll bring that mode back if there's a sequel."

While it may not have a Tripod Mode, Umurangi Generation on Switch will come complete with the DLC side story (titled Umurangi Generation Macro), full gyro controls (allowing you to twist and turn the console in Handheld Mode at any angle to get just the right shot) and the option to send every in-game picture you take straight to the console's photo Album, ready for posting on social media.

Faulkner hopes that the game stands the test of time, imagining that ". . . if people play the game and just see it as a cross between Pokémon Snap and Jet Set Radio, and they enjoy it, that's great, but my hope is that those people will come back to it in a few years and see it in a new light, because there is a lot more there. There's a reason why the game's skies are red, and it was made during the same year that Australian bush fires turned our skies to ash. My mother actually lost her home to those fires. So there's some deeply personal things, some highly political things, that you can find there if you look."

He also plans to come back to the Switch with an all-new game in the future, hinting several times that it may even have a "64" in the title. As that plan develops, we can focus on Umurangi Generation, which is planned for release on Switch very soon. If you decide to step into its world, send a few great photos our way by tagging **@NintendoForce** on Twitter! **— JONATHAN**

A Portal to an Alternate Past

With the arrival of Famicom Detective Club, the eShop is increasingly becoming a source of long-sought localizations.

IT ALL BEGAN with Beginnings.

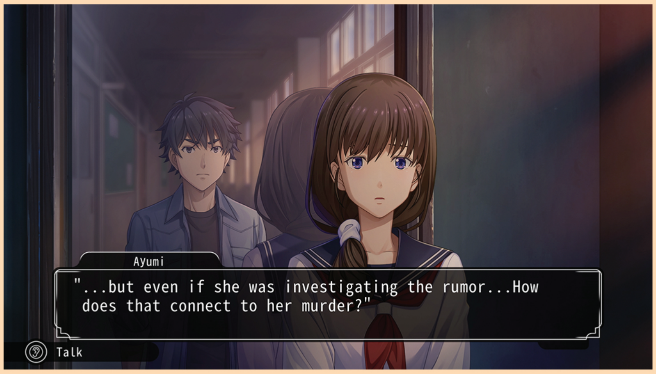
At E3 2015, with no warning whatsoever, Nintendo suddenly revealed that the first installment in the Mother/EarthBound series would be released – in English! – as a digital download in the Wii U eShop. Mother 1 was originally meant to be launched on the NES a quarter-century earlier, sometime around 1990, and its localization had been nearly completed at that time. But that release, which would have been called simply "EarthBound," got canned at the last minute. Nintendo sat on it for 25 years, then finally brought it back as EarthBound Beginnings.

Just a few months ago, also without warning, Nintendo similarly revived the first-ever installment of the Fire Emblem franchise. Shadow Dragon & the Blade of Light had also been skipped over for Western release in that same circa-1990 era of Nintendo history, and Fire Emblem games didn't start getting localized releases until 2004. But someone at Nintendo of America saw some untapped potential there, and we got a 30-years-late English language release in the Switch eShop.

The same thing's about to happen a third time: Another contemporary of that time period, Famicom Detective Club, is just about to be offered in English for the first time, over three decades after its original Japanese release. Is a new trend taking shape?

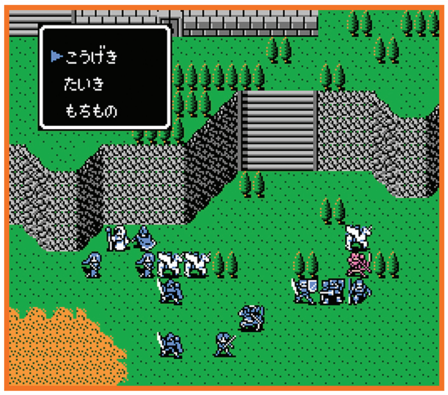
Three points of data probably aren't enough to extrapolate any true insight into Nintendo's inner thought process – especially since there was a stretch of over five years between the EarthBound and Fire Emblem games I've just mentioned – but it's enough to get me scratching my beard and wondering if there's something bigger brewing here. Nintendo has shied away from making all-new entries in long-running franchises for release in the various eShops over the years. But tapping back into the past and finally bringing untranslated games of 25 or 30 years ago to Western audiences? They seem to be getting more and more on board with that. And, what's more, their efforts are ramping up!

EarthBound Beginnings was a no-frills digital release of an old NES ROM – it was treated as an NES Virtual Console game, and its title screen even just said "EarthBound" as it was meant to in 1990; the "Beginnings" part was just marketing. But then Fire Emblem got more effort, as an all-new English localization seems to have been made for it – not one that was done decades ago and just dusted off now – and it got celebrated with a big, physical "30th Anniversary" package too. Famicom Detective Club? The most effort yet, as rather than just bringing back its old 8-bit visuals, it's been totally overhauled and remade as a modern visual novel experience. It looks spectacular!



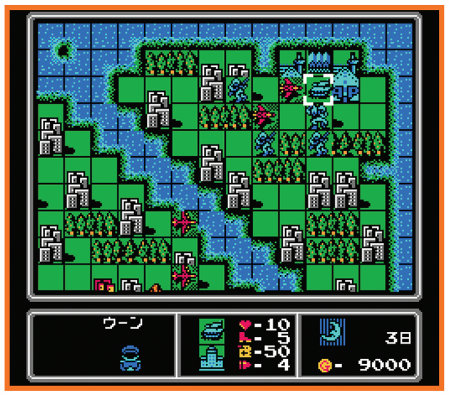
A SET OF SIX MORE 8-BIT POSSIBILITIES

If the powers that be at the Big N were to decide to keep the party going and bring us more decades-late localizations drawn from the same 8-bit era, here are half a dozen of the most likely candidates for consideration.



FIRE EMBLEM GAIDEN

They brought us Fire Emblem 1, so a natural next release could be Fire Emblem 2! This second installment in the strategy series was just remade a few years ago as Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia on 3DS. But Shadow Dragon's previous remake didn't stop its 8-bit original version from getting released, so it could still happen!



FAMICOM WARS

While Fire Emblem has thrived throughout the last decade, its sister series has slept. Why not wake up the Advance Wars brand with a localized launch of its Japan-only first installment? There's not nearly as much text to translate, and the grid-based tactical gameplay would appeal to everyone who just played Fire Emblem 1.

SHIN ONIGASHIMA

The Famicom Detective Club series only had two games, so it's now been remade in full on Switch. Its developers could carry on their work by modernizing other visual novels from that same era, like Shin Onigashima, a tale of two siblings on a quest to save their parents from a sinister dragon and an army of soul-stealing ogres!

YŪYŪKI

Shin Onigashima was the first game in the "Famicom Fairytales" series, and this was the second. An adaptation of Journey to the West (like Dragon Ball), it stars a boy with a monkey tail named Goku (like Dragon Ball). The proximity to the popularity of that certain Super Saiyan could give a revival of this adventure an extra boost!

FAMICOM GRAND PRIX II: 3D HOT RALLY

The precursor to Mario Kart! I've never understood why this high-octane racing game never made it to America, especially since Mario and Luigi were placed prominently on the box art and were playable drivers in-game. This is a game that could be released as-is into the eShop – but it's never been re-released. Not even in Japan!

THE MYSTERIOUS MURASAME CASTLE

Finally, this last selection actually did get a decades-late Western release in the 3DS eShop in 2014 – but it was untranslated. A more thorough revival or full remake could finally give samurai hero Takamaru his moment in the sun, as he's gained a bit more attention recently thanks to his Smash series Assist Trophy appearances.

It's also getting two releases right from the start – full remakes of both 1988's Famicom Detective Club game, "The Missing Heir" and its prequel, 1989's "The Girl Who Stands Behind," were greenlit together, rather than Nintendo of America only approving the localization of one and waiting to see how well it sold before giving the nod to the next.

I think we have the eShop to thank for that. Yes, Fire Emblem got that big physical package recently, but it didn't have the game itself on cartridge – just a download code. Nintendo is bringing these games out because they have a way to do so that avoids the costs involved in physical game production. EarthBound Beginnings never would have seen the light of day in 2015 if publishing it on a physical Wii U disc had been the only option. With the eShop, though, the cost to release that game must have been somewhere in the range of $0.00.

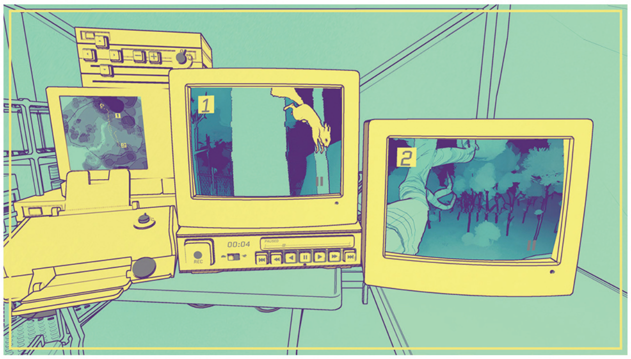
I'm here for it. Sure, I'd love to have a physical release of the new Famicom Detective Club remakes – a nice two-in-one combo cart. And maybe that will happen at some point if the eShop sales take off like a rocket. But if it doesn't, I'm incredibly content with having only digital versions. Because in the debate between "download-only" and "never getting the game at all," I'm picking the side that finally lets me play these games that I've been curious about since I was a kid in the '80s.

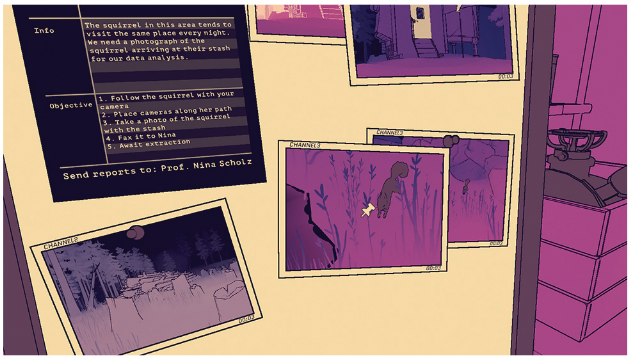
I hope that the Famicom Detective Club games do well, and I hope that these three points of data do end up building into an ongoing trend. There are dozens of other games Nintendo skipped over for English-language translation and release just in that same late '80s and early '90s time period, and dozens more in the decades since. Translated 8-bit forms? Full-on modern remakes? I'll take anything Nintendo's willing to offer.

If you're surfing that same wavelength along with me, consider downloading Famicom Detective Club: The Missing Heir when it launches in the Switch eShop on May 14. And, if you enjoy it, dive into The Girl Who Stands Behind as well – it goes on sale on the same day! Individually, each one will be priced at $34.99, which is pretty hefty for a download, admittedly. But if you buy one, you'll get a discount of $10 on the other, so the total cost for both with land under 60 bucks. The same as you'd pay for most Nintendo new releases anyway.

We'll have our full reviews of both in the next NF issue! **– LUCAS**

REVIEWS





Squirrel Surveillance

NUTS

WHEN A GAME has a name as apt as NUTS, it makes reviewing it that much more fun. This is a game unlike any that has come before it, in that it's a squirrel surveillance simulator. And it is, in fact, nuts.

You are a research intern and your boss is Dr. Nina Scholz. She actually first ran the experiment you're carrying out back in the '80s – she showed that endangered squirrels in the area were prevalent enough to halt a major development. Now the developers are at it again, so you're dispatched to show that the squirrels are still there.

The color scheme is definitely jarring at first, but you learn to navigate the minimalistic space. In fact, the contrast of the landscape color versus the color of equipment, collectables and squirrels helps you focus.

While there isn't much of a tutorial, it operates as easily as any first-person engine and everything is pretty straightforward. With each completed task, Dr. Nina reveals more of the overarching story. It's part of the puzzle, and the puzzle is glorious.

I admit I was skeptical, but by the second night I was all-in on this crazy game. You get cameras to set up, and it's trial and error to see if you catch any squirrels within their fields of vision or not. Your starting point is where the squirrels were spotted last based on the previous research, and it's marked on your GPS. Once you've placed your cameras, then it's back to your trailer to watch the monitors during the night for the short time the animals are active. Then you back-trace the squirrels on their unchanging path through the forest each night until you discover their nest.

It's legitimately satisfying when you see a squirrel and find you've guessed the path correctly, but it's also fun to find you're completely wrong and have to rethink the whole thing. You'll wonder where the little nut hoarders are headed at every turn!

It's fun with a group to bounce ideas off of too. The circumstances change every round to avert tedium: Some nights you'll be tracking where a lone squirrel is at certain intervals; other nights you'll be trailing multiple squirrels. I don't want to spoil any of the subplot, but things turn far more serious than following squirrels toward the end, and it's not just the squirrels' lives in danger!

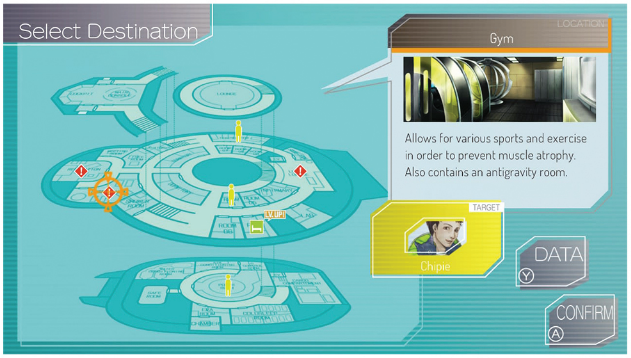
The game is quite short, only lasting a handful of hours. There are some collectables to discover, like Nina's tapes, but generally the emphasis is less on exploration and more on surveillance and tracking.

Two dings I will give it are pointing out that it suffers from lengthy loading times, and once it's done, there isn't much point in going back unless you want to grab the tapes you may have missed. So not a lot of replay value.

But NUTS is smart, intuitive and very fun. And while it's short, the experience of the game is worth it, especially if you're in a gaming rut – or just a nut! **– BRETT**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NOODLECAKE DEVELOPERS: JOON, POL, MUUTSCH, CHAR & TORFI RATING: T



Among Them
GNOSIA

YOU'RE ON A spaceship. There is a threat, called the Gnosia, that infects humans and coerces them to kill one another. Everyone's taking a vote on who they think the Gnosia are so they can be put into cold sleep. Someone is chosen. You find out too late . . . they were the wrong one.

* * * *LOOP* * * *

You're on a spaceship. There are more people here than last time. Is that a beluga in a pink space suit? There is a threat, called the Gnosia, that infects humans and coerces them to kill one another. Everyone's taking a vote on who they think the Gnosia are so they can be put into cold sleep. Someone is chosen. Your instincts were correct, and your crewmates congratulate you.

* * * *LOOP* * * *

Petit Depotto's bold, critically acclaimed Gnosia is a science fiction adaptation of a party game known as "Mafia" or "Werewolf," where players have set roles and need to work together to neutralize a common threat. It's been expanded to become a complete stat-building visual novel wherein your character learns more skills to guide them through discussions and learns more about themselves and their comrades as they face the threat of the Gnosia. After every loop, when the votes are tallied, you earn EXP to put toward your pool of six stats, and hopefully you and your main ally come one step closer to unraveling the secret of the storyline. What are the Gnosia? What is their purpose? And what secrets are everyone hiding?

It will take you some time to get going, with the first two dozen or so loops being devoted to establishing the gameplay mechanics and the functions of different roles, both helpful and hindering. A Gnosia tries their best to not be discovered as they eliminate crew members, and they can pose as the Engineer or Doctor. The Engineer and Doctor can detect Gnosia, but the AC Follower is a human turncoat who can also pose as them. Those on Guard Duty vouch for each other, and the Guardian Angel protects one crew member from the Gnosia each night. And then there's the Bug, and if they win, *everyone* loses . . .

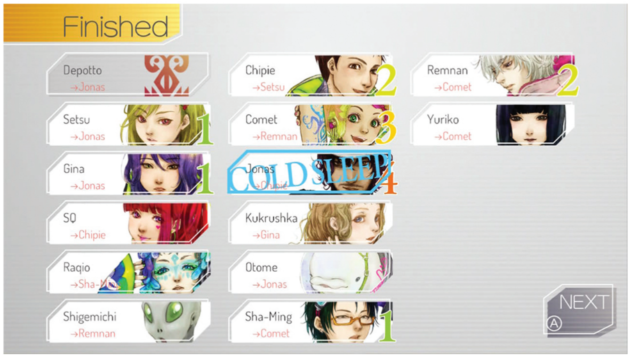
Once you've been through the tutorial levels, you can play with the settings of the crew complement, special roles and number of Gnosia in order to advance the story. The controls are simple to use, with the trigger buttons displaying on-screen status indicators when held, and a menu that includes dialogue recaps and reports that's almost always accessible. It's repetitive to loop and loop again, but you eventually unlock an auto-set feature that makes it easier to trigger story events.

It took me around 150 loops (less than eight hours) to roll the credits on Gnosia, but I enjoyed the story and characters immensely. It's not gory (there are a few "fade to red" shots, and that's it) but there are some fairly dark themes (one of the characters mentions being subjected to slavery and abuse), some creepy imagery and adult language, so it's not for everyone. If you're a Zero Escape fan, I'd highly recommend this title: It's got time travel, an eclectic cast, a banging soundtrack and outlandish future technology. In fact, I think Gnosia would be what Kotaro Uchikoshi would have made if he were the designer of Among Us.

Even if you've never played any of the Zero Escape trilogy, Gnosia is still a great single-player experience for someone who loves social deduction games. Its repetitive nature will be a turn off to some, but once you understand the mechanics, you're in for a wild ride. **— REBECCA**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: PLAYISM
DEVELOPER: PETIT DEPOTTO
RATING: T



7.0

Freaks & Geeks

CYANIDE & HAPPINESS – FREAKPOCALYPSE

BASED ON THE webcomic and animated shorts of the same name, Cyanide & Happiness – Freakpocalypse is a point-and-click adventure game that follows the plight of Coop McCarthy, an orphaned boy living in the suburb of Netherville.

Most video game heroes tend to face struggles of some kind, and Coop is no different. In his case, however, his struggles are with virtually everyone hating him, particularly in school. As a result, he has to overcome adversity in the form of clearing his permanent record so he can go on the class field trip to a bomb shelter, finding and returning a late book to a *very* vengeful librarian and, of course, surviving the wrath of the school bullies.

You're probably thinking "and zombies, too, right? Or mutants? Something like that?" Well, that remains to be seen, as Freakpocalypse is but part one of a "tragilogy" – that is, "trilogy of tragedy." And the first episode here really serves more to give you an idea of what a day in the life of Coop is like before shaking things up at the end.

It's also pretty short, all told. If you know what you're doing, where to go and what to grab, and you ignore the fluff, you can clear this puppy in a fair bit under two hours. That said, doing so kind of ignores what the core of the game is: looking around at, talking to and touching darn near everything in sight. (In many, if not most cases, you can do all three). This often results in Coop delivering a one-liner with some insight or simple snark.

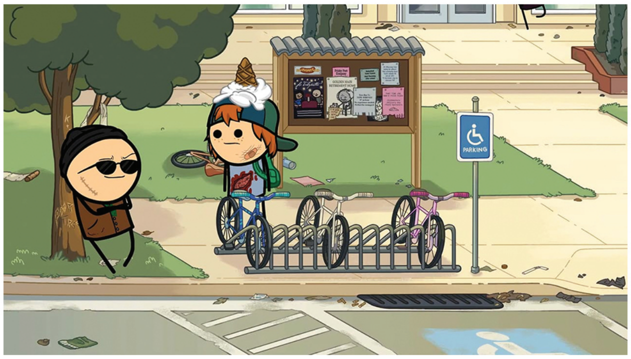
Further padding things out are sidequests, and just figuring out what you need to do to advance the story as well. As is common with point-and-click adventure games, the answer isn't always obvious, and can sometimes even be a little obtuse. This is further compounded by the items you pick up – sometimes you might find something you need, but if you're slightly off, then it may not register properly. Plus, you can combine some items, too, giving you one more thing to figure out. Fortunately, some puzzles have multiple solutions, so there are different things you can try in order to achieve the desired result, which also lends some bit of replay value.

The presentation is spot-on, emulating the look, sound and feel of the source material perfectly. Voice actors from the series are present, and you'll even spot some familiar characters (Shark Dad!) and bits if you're a longtime fan of the series. Of course, it bears mentioning that the M rating here is well warranted – the humor here definitely skews adult, and it's certainly not going to be for everyone, whether it's for its themes, mean-spiritedness (I guess that's the "cyanide"), over-the-top absurdity (I think that'd be the "happiness") or other reasons.

If you know the series, you know what you're getting into; if not, go brush up on ExplosmEntertainment's YouTube channel first. Even then, despite the game's relatively short length, the sheer density of their brand of comedy might be a lot for some to take in all at once.

Overall, this one's a little tough to rate. As a game, it's competent, but not spectacular, yet it does justice to its source material, despite ending before this chapter's title is really justified. Honestly, if you think that you're the audience for this game, then you're probably the audience for this game. **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SERENITY FORGE DEVELOPER: SKELETON CREW STUDIOS RATING: M



Super Mole-io 3D World

MAIL MOLE

SO I WAS looking at the slate of recently released titles on the eShop, wondering what to dive into next, when I stumbled across a new 3D platformer called Mail Mole. There was a spark of promise that made me more than a little interested – and besides, the world could always use more 3D platformers!

Taking a few cues from Mario's third-dimensional romps, Mail Mole slips you into the moleskin of Molty, a speedy delivery mole charged with restoring Carrotland's electrical grid by dropping off the handwritten Reset Codes at all the nearby Power Stations. Why the staff at said Stations wouldn't have those critical codes stashed on the premises, I haven't the foggiest! (Hey, if ol' Mario requires only the most threadbare excuse to gallivant across the world, the impetus for Molty's task need not be too elaborate either!)

This isn't your typical run-and-jump, as Molty spends most of the time burrowing just below the surface. Pressing the jump button doesn't immediately launch him skyward; rather, the longer you hold the button, the higher Molty will leap upon release. Any platforming ace who places their trust in experience and muscle memory will be spending the duration of their playtime trying to acclimate to this unorthodox system.

Along with a ground pound and dash technique, Molty is well equipped to scour the lands for spare carrots and hidden berries. Carrots serve as the game's currency, allowing you to customize your tenacious talpid with fun gear from the clothing shop or respawn from a lost life in exchange for five of the root vegetables (not unlike in Super Mario Odyssey).

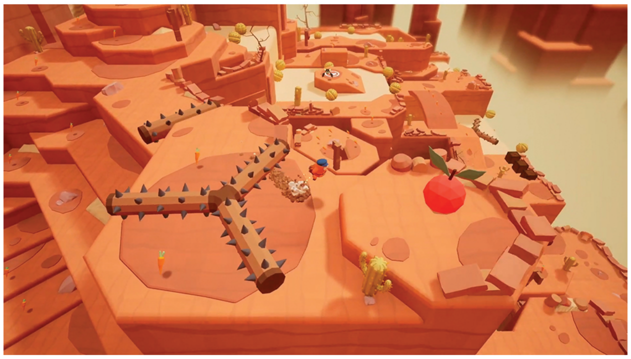
Though controls require fighting against ingrained habits, Mail Mole is otherwise a smartly designed experience. Objects and environments are rendered with simple geometry and soft colors, which offer incredible readability. The automatic camera, often the bane of 3D platformers, knows where to focus to provide players the clearest view of the action. And the levels themselves are short enough to never overstay their welcome, yet packed with so many wild obstacles, from blocks that toggle permeability every time you jump to tubes that spin when weight is applied to them. (My favorites are the race levels, in which Molty zips on autopilot like during the boost sections of Sonic Unleashed!)

Yet it often feels like Mail Mole merely "plays the hits" and avoids crafting its own identity. The art style may be soft and relaxing, but for that very reason it lacks the panache to stick to the back of your mind after the Switch has gone to sleep. The cast is devoid of any unique characterization or design aside from "Wouldn't it be silly if a skunk wore a lab coat?" Then there's the general lack of polish, like how the game always adds an extra second to the timer when recording clear times, or the copious grammar and spelling errors. (And yes, I know that I should cut such a tiny studio some slack, but they should have been able to catch that speech bubble near the opening that was left entirely untranslated!)

While I enjoyed my time with Mail Mole for the few hours the adventure lasted, the experience left no impression significant enough to encourage a return to Carrotland. I was looking to scratch my 3D platformer itch, but in the end, Molty couldn't quite offer the relief I so desperately crave! **— TONY**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: UNDERCODERS DEVELOPERS: UNDERCODERS & TALPA GAMES RATING: E

6.0



Undead vs. Underwear

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS RESURRECTION

IF YOU'VE BEEN playing video games for a long enough time, chances are you know what you're getting into here – this is a Ghosts 'N Goblins game through and through, and that brings with it a degree of difficulty that this particular entry wears as proudly as a pair of strawberry-emblazoned boxer shorts.

Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection is HARD, and not always in the good kind of way. Where modern ultra-tough games like Super Meat Boy focus on precision movements to get you through areas of difficulty that seem insurmountable, the best of their kind always do so with a sense of fairness. There's certainly some of that on display here, but a sizable chunk of the challenge also comes from the screen filling with enemies at a moment's notice, or obstacles and branching paths that are nigh impossible to react to.

This didn't necessarily have to be a problem, and in fact the developers designed the game around the idea that you're going to die, and die often. As such, they've done away with lives altogether, which is great. You get as many tries as you want, and when you die they give you options like choosing which checkpoint you want to go back to, or even lowering the difficulty on the fly. Heck, they'll even sometimes throw some words of encouragement your way.

On paper, this is exactly how to handle a game like this, but in practice, Capcom overlooked one very important aspect: the game's flow. On every difficulty level except the easiest (which allows you to respawn almost anywhere you want immediately where you died), each death results in every aspect of the game grinding to a halt so it can present you with options on how to proceed. It's quick, but not seamless. There's even a brief loading screen.

So in a game where a significant number of your attempts can last less than a few seconds, this gets incredibly tedious. As a result, it can be difficult to appreciate all that this game gets right, which is honestly a lot, especially in the realms of sight and sound.

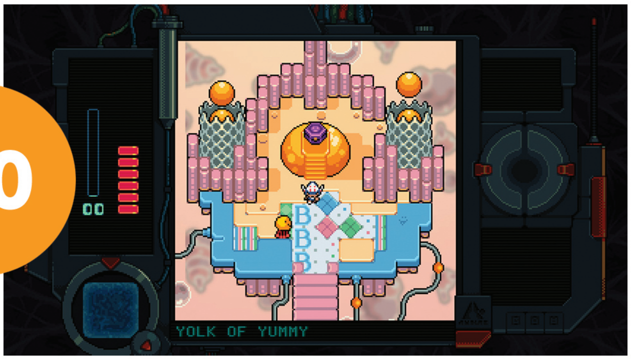
The graphics' "storybook" style was fairly divisive when the game was first announced, but during gameplay it's gorgeous. This is easily one of the best-looking titles in the franchise. The soundtrack is excellent as well – when you can hear it, that is. Thanks again to the way the game handles death, the music gets cut off and played from the beginning every single time you die.

One major positive is the multiplayer mode. Here, a second player controls a sort of "familiar" character that can fly around and help you out by creating platforms or taking out stray monsters. It doesn't make the game easy, but it does mitigate the overwhelming challenge.

If you're a fan of the GNG series, it's a pretty safe bet that this game is going to be right up your alley. It certainly takes some great steps in the right direction in terms of modernizing this series – but it doesn't quite stick the landing. **– KRIS**

7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: E10+



7.0

3D Meets 2D Meets . . . Vacuuming?

ANODYNE 2: RETURN TO DUST

IN AN AGE where gamers are deciding what has aged well or not, many games from the PS1 and N64 era are panned. Anodyne 2 uses this style, but also has extensive 2D elements that take on the 16-bit and, at times, pre-8-bit eras, and pairing the two has interesting results in a modern setting.

You start the game as Nova the Nano Cleaner – a product of The Center. Palisade and C Psalmist, your creators, run The Center and create you to rid New Theland of Nano Dust. The dust clouds the judgement and health of the denizens of New Theland, and literally creates dust clouds to limit your journey. In a 2D sequence, Nova is set up with the Glandilock Seed that allows her to convert dust to cards. The cards she finds then close up the prism meant to encapsulate the dust.

New Theland appears to be fairly small at first, but it's slow to traverse due to Nova's walk speed. Luckily she can transform – inexplicably – into a vehicle, but it's pretty squirrelly and takes some practice to handle. Do not mess with the camera in driving mode!

After helping the citizens in the beginning area, a new area opens up, and then another much larger expanse. The game unfortunately doesn't introduce collectables to necessitate exploration until late in the third section. Until then, you're just roaming and talking to incredibly odd-looking entities to see who needs help. Nova uses her Spark to create a connection with them, then shrinks down and enters their bodies to rid them of dust.

Going into a dust-ridden individual sets up a small rhythm-based minigame to wear down defenses, then Nova is seen in her 2D form to explore them like dungeons. The fun but not overly difficult puzzles here make the weirdness of the normal world somewhat tolerable.

The game feels more like an art piece with its melodramatic story, drab or absent music and sound effects, dry gameplay and bleak set-pieces. Character designs are interesting, but often the characters are not. Generally, the dialogue and predicaments of most of the characters in the game are inconsequential and just plain odd.

I felt the game really caught my interest in the third section of the story, where things got far more experimental, off-the-cuff and mysterious. One nanoscape is a full-blown mini RPG, where another seems to have you glitch out and enter a small horror vignette. Nothing is as it seems, though, and one nanoscape will have Nova questioning everything. When she gains the ability to Spark inside nanoscapes and shrink further down the rabbit hole, things take a turn toward Inception. It's all fascinating and strange, but why isn't this genius spread more evenly across the game? It's a slog to get to this point. It's almost hard to play.

I encountered several map holes and other design flaws early on as well, which made me question some portions of the third section. Were these design problems, or actual meta call-backs to the earlier eras of gaming that influenced this game so much?

It's hard to explain, and I think that's the takeaway here: Anodyne 2 is like nothing I've played before. That in and of itself is a feat in today's oversaturated market, but this one isn't for everyone. **– BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: RATALAIKA GAMES DEVELOPER: ANALGESIC PRODUCTIONS RATING: E10+

10

Two for the Price of One

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 9

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

ZELDA AND SHEIK shared a single slot in Melee. In Brawl, Samus would blast her own armor off and turn into her Zero Suit self when she used her Final Smash. Charizard broke free from the Pokémon Trainer to fight alone on Wii U, but now it's back to being teamed up with both Ivysaur and Squirtle once again on Switch. Throughout Smash history, seeing two- or even three-in-one characters has not been exactly common, but it hasn't been unheard of either. Now, Pyra and Mythra add to that linked-together legacy.

The centerpiece of the story in Xenoblade Chronicles 2, Pyra is the Aegis, a legendary Blade who bonds herself to the main character, Rex, as he becomes her Driver. Naturally, an Ice Climbers kind of duo with both Rex and Pyra fighting together was considered for Smash. Ultimately, though, Rex was cut in favor of a different partner for Pyra: her own alter ego, Mythra.

Pyra and Mythra are both the same being, but with different personalities and kind of from different time periods – you'll have to play XC2 to gain a full understanding of their dual dynamic. In the context of Smash, their relationship has simply been interpreted the same way Zelda and Sheik's was in Melee: They live in the same character slot, and in battle you can freely swap back and forth between them using Down + B.

It's a good call from the dev team – Rex was never the appeal of the Rex & Pyra duo. No one's lamenting his loss. (He still has a few cameos.)

With the emphasis entirely on Pyra and Mythra, a clear gameplay balance emerges: Pyra focuses on power, while Mythra's made for speed. The two share most of their normal moves, slashing their sword in the same arcs for the most part – it's just that Mythra's attacks come out quicker, while Pyra's are slower but do more damage. You can use Mythra to dash in and build up the damage percentages of foes with her quickness, then swap to Pyra for her added launching power to finish the fight and score a KO. They complement one another well.

In fact, these two are probably the best-balanced duo among all the same-slot teams we've seen. Zelda and Sheik could transform into one another because of the storyline of Ocarina of Time, but their wildly different styles of play in Smash didn't necessarily mesh together well. It was more of a novelty when they swapped, and that's why they've long since been separated out into their own slots. Pyra and Mythra will never be pulled apart – their duality is key.

Challenger Pack 9 would be worth a purchase for the roster addition alone, but the new Cloud Sea of Alrest stage deserves recognition as well. It's gorgeous, for one, as you swim through the clouds and see titans from XC2 loom large in the background, but it's also unique in a gameplay capacity too: The stage is built on the back of Gramps, a small titan, and he'll sometimes turn his head, which removes his head and neck from being a viable platform for a while. You can toggle that off, but it's funny when someone is trying to recover and he just nopes right out of the way to make them plummet to their doom instead.

Fighters Pass 2 only has two more to go after this, but with this one being a two-in-one, we can't be too sad! Buy this pair with confidence and get double the bang for your buck.

– LUCAS

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

Embracing the future by traveling to the past.

IT'S ALL BEEN leading up to this.

In 2018, Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee! & Let's Go, Pikachu! brought the long-running and still wildly popular series of monster-catching adventures to a home console for the first time. It was a tentative first step, in many ways, as the story and setting simply recycled those of the franchise's first generation again – but new innovations were included as well, like being able to see wild Pokémon roaming around in the environment before battling them. That had never happened before, and it pointed to what would come next.

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RELEASE: EARLY 2022 RATING: RP

In 2019, anyone who might've dismissed the Let's Go games as simple spin-offs got a true new generation of the mainline Pokémon saga on Switch in the form of Sword & Shield. They took the idea of seeing Pokémon living and active in the wild to the next level with the introduction of the Wild Area, a huge, open-world zone in the middle of the new Galar region that broke the old mold of keeping overworld exploration limited to defined, separated routes. Routes were still in the mix – most of the game continued to use that old "Point A to Point B" structure. But the Wild Area again pointed to what would come next.

DLC. Sword & Shield, rather than getting a remixed "third version" a year later as several past generations had done, instead embraced expansion in the form of paid downloadable content in 2020. Buying the DLC pass opened up new areas of the Galar region: the Isle of Armor and the Crown Tundra. Both fully embraced the Wild Area open-world approach. You can go anywhere, any time. You have full control over the camera. You can see Pokémon just living their lives in the forests and caves and rivers and can choose to battle them if you want, or else pedal right past on your bike (which also works on water). These DLCs put the last puzzle pieces in place. Clearly, step by step, Game Freak and The Pokémon Company had been leading up to something big:

Pokémon's Breath of the Wild.

Ever since the release of that trailblazing masterpiece of the Legend of Zelda series in 2017, Pokémon fans have been crying out for a similarly structured open-world adventure in Pikachu's universe. Clearly that call to action was heard, and piece by piece, it's been being built up to happen.

Now, it's here! . . . Well, almost. It's not due to launch until 2022, but you get what I'm getting at: Pokémon is fully embracing open-world gameplay in the new Pokémon Legends: Arceus.

This all-new adventure is set in the Sinnoh region, first seen in Pokémon Diamond & Pearl (and also due to be seen again in their upcoming remakes – see Page 36). This isn't the same Sinnoh, though. This is the Sinnoh of yesteryear, as Pokémon Legends: Arceus takes place in the past – in an age when the region was almost entirely uninhabited by humans and Pokémon lived free across an expansive wilderness.

It's a clever idea! You couldn't very well achieve the Breath of the Wild feeling of go-anywhere exploration in the modern Pokémon world, defined as it is by massive cities and huge stadiums built for battling. Here, it's Pokémon distilled back down to its original essence: venturing out into the unknown to find wild monsters and catch 'em all.

That appears to be the core of the Pokémon Legends: Arceus experience, from what we've seen of it so far. You take command of a young explorer, head out across the massive, open landscape, try to find as many unique Pokémon species as you can and then catch them.

How that plays out is different than in past games, though – here, you don't necessarily have to battle a Pokémon before you attempt to capture it. Stealth seems like the name of the game, as our new heroes have new moves like crouching to hide in tall grass, dodge rolling to quickly avoid detection (and attacks?) and throwing Poké Balls freely, without the need to call up a menu to activate that action. We've seen these kinds of moves in dozens of other franchises before, but never in the world of Pokémon – that setting makes all the difference in giving these kinds of gameplay actions a fresh feeling.

Speaking of the setting again, the feudal Japan-esque time period will likely make a major impact. We've seen that the Poké Balls of this era look different: They seem to be made of wood, they've got a little latch on the front where the button normally goes and they're equipped with a spout on top that shoots out a puff of smoke when you successfully catch a 'mon. Functionally, they seem to operate the same as they always have – you can even carry a set of six captured creatures with you at a time, which is also normal. But what about when you catch more than six? There can't very well be a PC storage system to digitally hold the overflow, decades before computers were invented . . . perhaps you'll just toss the extras into a literal box?

And what about traversal? Sword & Shield had that fancy bike that automatically transformed itself into a kind of hovercraft to let you ride on water, but having that same thing available in this time period would seem out of place. Maybe your character will just swim? Or will we see a return of the concept of riding Pokémon to help us get from place to place?

Let's keep the questions going: Will Pokémon Legends: Arceus offer an equivalent for Breath of the Wild's Paraglider? That was a critical component in getting around in the land of Hyrule, and its functionality could conceivably be replicated by hanging on to the talons of a Flying-type 'mon.

But then what about Breath of the Wild's climbing? Another critical component. Will our heroes be able to go vertical like that here? Or maybe call upon a 'mon to Vine Whip them up the side of a mountain, or let them hold on to their backs while the Pokémon does the climbing itself?

As you can see, it's easy to go deep into the Raboot hole now that "Breath of the Wild Pokémon" is finally on the table as something that's really happening, rather than just a wished-for dream for the future. But, having brought up those kinds of questions, I now want to responsibly bring our expectations back down.

Pokémon Legends: Arceus won't have every open-world amenity. As we've seen, Game Freak and The Pokémon Company have only reached this point gradually, taking one patient step after another. It's most likely that this first true open-world adventure will be just the next step – it'll be bold and different in a few ways we've never seen before from the Pokémon brand, but it won't go too far too fast. Because whatever the next game is that comes after this one needs to have a clear next step to take in evolving the gameplay further, too.

And it's telling that this isn't being billed as the main series' next generation, either. It's possible that the core series could embrace some of the ideas being explored here, and it's also possible that "Legends" will just be its own thing.

I'm excited about the uncertainty. Pokémon's RPGs have progressed in a fairly safe and predictable manner up to this point, but now it seems like there are multiple viable directions that the games can pursue going forward, so we'll never be able to be entirely sure what we'll see next from now on. That's great! Variety is going to be the spice that helps this series succeed for another 25 years.

Pokémon Legends: Arceus is set to debut in "Early 2022" as of now, but given the ongoing challenges of the global pandemic and the fact that the first footage shown seemed pretty rough around the edges, I think it'd be best to not carve that release window into stone in your mind quite yet. Even if it does make it to market early next year, we've still got several NF issues to come between now and then, so look forward to more coverage of this exciting next step for the series soon!
– LUCAS

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: RP

SPLATOON 3

The Turf Wars continue . . . in the middle of a desolate wasteland!

***MY LIFE FADES,** the vision dims. All that remains are memories. I remember a time of chaos, ruined dreams, this wasted land. But most of all, I remember the Road Warrior . . . err . . . Squid Warrior?*

Nintendo has successfully managed to implant in our minds this notion of "just one main title per series per platform," thus fans have been trained not to expect follow-up chapters in our favorite franchises until the next major hardware arrives. Obviously, a new Splatoon would be a far-flung fantasy! Nobody would be foolish enough to hope for . . .

Oh, Splatoon 3 got announced at the end of the February 2021 Direct? Uhhh . . . very well, then!

It's now tradition for the latest Splatoon to use the results of the previous title's final Splatfest to inform its narrative. The original game's last match-up, during which Marie snatched victory from her musical partner Callie, led to a small rift and eventually allowed DJ Octavio to turn Callie into a mind-controlled enforcer. This time, as we leave the urban paradise of Inkopolis for the sun-scorched sandscape of the Splatlands, it seems that the entire world has been impacted by Team Chaos' win against Team Order in Splatoon 2.

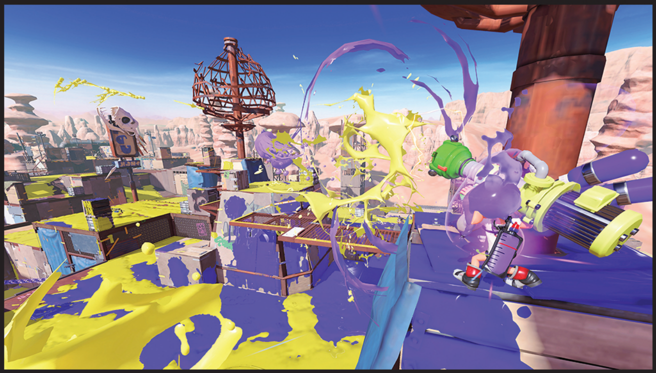
The concrete oasis in this despondent region is Splatsville, the "City of Chaos," where both Inklings and Octolings have built a strong community. Turf War is still the chief pastime, although our urban youth have been gifted some fresh toys and techniques. There are new weapons like the bow, fashioned from a fishing rod; spawner drones suspended in midair, allowing combatants to fire toward any spot in a limited space; and enhanced mobility options like rocketing off the top of an inked wall in squid form.

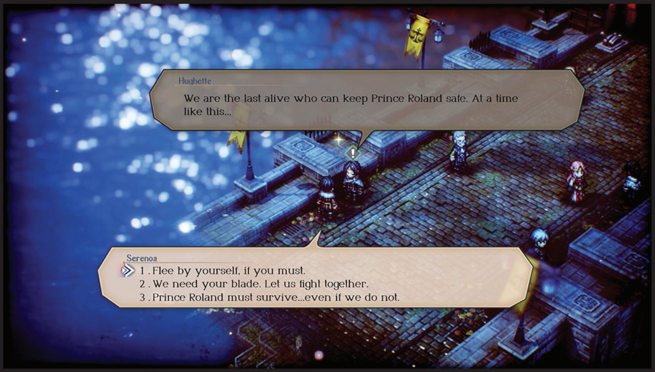
Character customization has likewise been expanded with additional hairstyles, gear and more. In the name of greater gender inclusivity, your choices are no longer segmented between "boys" and "girls" and instead can be mixed and matched freely. You also now have a little pet Salmonid – with its own selection of smart hairdos – that appears to follow behind your hero during the new single-player mode.

Speaking of which, little has been said about the solo adventure, though the trailer hints toward a more open environment that dives deeper into the Splatoon series' post-apocalyptic mythos – you can't show off an inverted Eiffel Tower smack in the middle of the desert and not expect players to have serious questions! We also don't know what new multiplayer modes will be added into the rotation, but hopefully Nintendo will take criticisms of the previous game to heart and grant players the freedom to tweak match parameters rather than be restricted to limited randomized stages and locked rulesets.

But the most pressing question of all is . . . who are the new idols? The Squid Sisters were your typical J-Pop pair, while Off the Hook injected hip-hop essence into their jams. What will the next group's angle be? A hard rock edge to match the rough and unforgiving arid lands they call home? A bluegrass-inspired folk sound? A blatant homage to Daft Punk named the Splat Punks? (C'mon, we totally know a new duo is inevitable!)

Expect more Splatoon 3 news throughout the year ahead as we await the descent into chaos on Switch in 2022! **– TONY**





PROJECT TRIANGLE STRATEGY

Turn-based tactics from the Octopath Traveler team!

IF YOU ENJOY agonizing over tough decisions in video games, you've got to give Project Triangle Strategy a try.

This tactical RPG is the latest entry in Square Enix's HD-2D series and was announced in the February Nintendo Direct. The game caught my attention because it looked like it would present tough choices and consequences as you play. Project Triangle Strategy's demo, which is available now, backs up what was shown in the Direct. While it only comprises a small portion of the game, there's a lot of promise packed into those few hours.

Project Triangle Strategy takes place in Norzelia, a land not far removed from the brutal Saltiron War that left its three nations, the Kingdom of Glenbrook, the Duchy of Aesfrost and the Holy State of Hyzante, in an uneasy peace. You play as protagonist Serenoa Wolffort, heir of House Wolffort in Glenbrook, who's joined by Prince Roland of Glenbrook, his childhood friend; Frederica Aesfrost, princess of the duchy and his fiancée; and Benedict Pascal, steward and advisor to House Wolffort.

Throughout the game, you and your allies will be tasked with making crucial choices that will determine your path forward, often embodying one of three ideals: morality, liberty and utility. The demo provides a small glimpse into how this works and drops you into the middle of the game's narrative, allowing you to play through Chapters VI and VII.

The main conflict of these chapters is whether or not to give your ally Prince Roland up to your enemy: Archduke Gustadolph of Aesfrost, who's recently invaded and seized control of Glenbrook's capital. Before you make this decision, you and your allies will vote on the game's Scales of Conviction to determine which path to take.

As Serenoa, you will have one vote to cast, so it's up to you to sway others to vote your way if you don't have the majority. For example, I didn't want to give Roland up, but I was in the minority (the game shows how your allies plan to vote beforehand). I had to gather evidence around town and use it to persuade my allies to change their minds.

Here's the fun part: You don't know if your persuasion actually works until after the votes are cast and read. I enjoyed the uncertainty of the Scales of Conviction mechanic, and it also does a good job of revealing your allies' own ideals and personalities.

Your choices carry just as much weight in the game's turn-based battles. In combat, the battlefield resembles a grid system similar to Fire Emblem games. Each ally is a unique class, takes up one square and has a specific range of movement and abilities. You can also see when you'll be in range of enemies while on the field.

Observation and positioning are especially important in battle. The game gives you a chance to explore the battlefield beforehand, so you can observe the terrain and think about potential advantages. It turned out to be a game-changer for me. Positioning your units is important because these enemies don't go down easily. You'll want to deal extra damage anytime you can by flanking, hitting enemies from the high ground or attacking several at a time with spells.

Project Triangle Strategy's demo showcased that your choices, both big and small, will affect the story as you play, and that has me excited to explore all the options when the final game releases in 2022. **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: T

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: JULY 16, 2021 RATING: E10+

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD

A rumor no more! Link will take flight again on Nintendo Switch.

LIKE THE GODDESS SWORD itself splitting a log in twain, The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword was nothing if not divisive. The reasons for this are manifold (a matter which we will elaborate upon more in the future), but many of the strongest dissenting opinions surround one central, key factor around which the entire game was developed: motion controls.

Skyward Sword was not the first game in the Zelda series to incorporate motion controls; that honor goes to its immediate predecessor, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, which had them added in for its appearance at the launch of the original Wii console. However, Skyward Sword's motion controls, bolstered by the Wii MotionPlus peripheral, were more sophisticated than those in just about any other title in the series before or since, or even any other game on the platform before it (save for the tragically overlooked Red Steel 2).

Some embraced the advanced integration of complex swordplay into the action, while others shunned it. Some would argue that it had to be this way; there was no other way the game could work. Others pointed at games like Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, released only two years later, as a way sword controls could be implemented with a more conventional control scheme. It was as much a question of whether Nintendo would release such a version as whether they could, and while the Wii U saw high definition versions of both The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker and Twilight Princess with various enhancements (and the latter returned to its motion controlless original GameCube form), that question would remain unanswered.

Fast-forward to February 17, 2021, and the first "full" Nintendo Direct presentation in about 18 months. Fans were champing at the bit to learn more about what was to come with the previously announced sequel to The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, and/or what plans Nintendo had to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the franchise. Toward the end of the nearly hour-long showcase, The Legend of Zelda series producer Eiji Aonuma appeared against a black background – not exactly a great sign – to reveal that while development was going smoothly, we would have to wait just a bit longer for any news.

Aonuma then threw to a trailer that revealed The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD is coming to the Nintendo Switch. This managed to be both expected, yet surprising – people figured it would happen eventually, but with Nintendo's penchant for porting Wii U games to the Switch, some also figured we wouldn't see a Skyward Sword remake until after Wind Waker and Twilight Princess had their third go-round (but hey, it is the 35th anniversary – Zelda 3D All-Stars, anyone?). But here it was, ready to return us to a land and a time before Hyrule was a thing.

Aonuma said that with the increased processing power of the Switch, the controls are now smoother and more intuitive, and the original Wii control scheme of Wii Remote Plus (held in your right hand to command the sword) and Nunchuk (held in your left, to direct the shield) is re-created across a pair of Joy-Con controllers. As before, you can also use the controllers to perform other actions, such as firing a bow and arrow.

Beyond the mere existence of the release itself, the first big surprise revealed was that this version would incorporate button-only controls, to facilitate the handheld nature of the NIntendo Switch and the portable-only NIntendo Switch Lite, as well as the Switch Pro Controller. As some predicted, this version of the controls maps the sword-swinging motions to the right control stick, with players pressing right to swing right, down to swing down, etc. (Whether those who might prefer inverted controls will get their wish remains to be seen.)

If the recent release of Super Mario 3D All-Stars (specifically the Super Mario Galaxy portion of the package) is any indication, this will hopefully suit both sides of the motion control argument. In that game, the more traditional controls worked quite well, while the motion controls seemed to perform even better than the original Wii version, perhaps owing to the more complex mechanisms within the Joy-Cons. Of course, without a sensor bar, that game had to have its pointer recalibrated constantly . . . but that was also the case in the original release of Skyward Sword, so we'll probably be no worse off there.

As for other quality-of-life improvements, Nintendo has said nothing yet, but hopefully they've taken the last decade's worth of feedback into account. While there's no doubt some elements will remain unchanged, such as the game's map structure, we can hope that others – such as reminding you what a Rupee is every time you pick one up after starting the game – will at the very least be toned down somewhat. And no doubt many a player would welcome an option that allows them to silence Fi before the spirit of the sword goes about her rambling recaps of what Link just heard.

There are many, *many* more aspects of Skyward Sword to revisit and re-evaluate now that its long-awaited re-release has finally been confirmed after years of whispered rumors. You can be sure that we'll be delving into the fullest depths of that discussion as the game's July launch approach. But you needn't follow us down into the dungeon of dissecting its divisiveness if you don't want to! Skyward Sword is still a winsome, heroic adventure at the end of the day, and it can be fully enjoyed for what it is without giving too much thought to what it isn't or what it might've been. And hey, it's got Groose! **— DAVID**

TRULY LEGENDARY

HYLIAN JOY-CONS

Alongside the game's release this July, there will also be a specially themed pair of Joy-Con controllers sold separately. The Joy-Con (R) features a design meant to evoke the features of the Master Sword, whereas the Joy-Con (L) shows those of the Hylian Shield. Over four years into the life cycle of the Nintendo Switch, we've seen several different "flavors" of Joy-Con sent out to market by Nintendo, but most have just featured new color combinations. The extra design accents on this set have already made them probably the most popular pair yet! It's a different approach compared to the special golden Wii Remote sold alongside Skyward Sword on Wii, but this might be even more appealing!

MIITOPIA

The RPG starring Miis scores a re-release.

ONCE AGAIN, it's time to face off (no pun intended) against the Dark Lord and their army of monsters that have ravaged the countryside, stealing the faces from nobility and peasantry alike. Grab your friends, your family, some coworkers and maybe a few random celebrities and animated characters, then venture once more into the wacky world of Miitopia when it releases on the Switch on May 21!

First released internationally on the 3DS in 2017, the original Miitopia featured cross compatibility with two Mii-centric Nintendo titles: the 3DS' Tomodachi Life and the now discontinued Miitomo smartphone app. This allowed you to "cast" Miis as party members who took on various RPG-related jobs, as well as the various NPCs you would meet on your travels, from a gargantuan king with an equally gargantuan appetite to a trio of fairy princesses. Many of these NPCs have been the victims of face theft by the Dark Lord's minions, including fruit-flavored slimes, goblins, living artwork and the ever-popular Twerkey.

Balancing your party members' personality quirks and relationships was the key to developing different skills and combo attacks, but if two of your characters had a grudge, it could turn into a full-fledged fight right in the middle of battle. You don't want Mii Grandma and Mii Uncle Delmar falling into a family feud!

Along with the standard RPG classes of fighters, healers, rogues and mages, there are other character classes, such as the Tank (who could use other party members as human cannonballs), the Flower (who harnesses the magic of nature) and the Cat (which . . . is a cat). Will the remake add more to the mix?

This remake is being co-developed by Grezzo, the team also responsible for the 3DS ports of Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask, as well as 2019's charming revival of Link's Awakening. They've added some fun new features, such as a new makeup and wig system for base Miis that lets you add scars, eye sparkles and fantastic custom-colored hairstyles. They've also added dates for two of your Miis to go on, from quiet walks on the beach to the movies and karaoke.

Another new introduction: a recruitable horse! You can customize it any way you want with different body and mane styles and colors (even turning it into a unicorn), and it has some special skills that can be used in battle, such as a fiery snort. (And you can develop a relationship and go out on dates with the horse, too, in case you were wondering.)

One major difference between the original and the remake is the ability to import Miis made by others onto your Switch. During the 3DS era, you could search for and select Miis from a "Mii Central" user-produced database, or use the built-in camera on your 3DS to scan QR codes of Miis made by others. For those with a Nintendo Switch Online account, you'll be able to share and download Miis made in Miitopia directly onto your console from the Nintendo Switch Online phone app using a password. In addition, you should be able to use any Miis already attached to user accounts on your Switch. Perhaps a more robust Mii Maker on a system level will come out of this?

I am cautiously optimistic about the new features in the Switch version of Miitopia: I rated the 3DS version a 6.5 back in Issue #29, citing the repetitive nature of battle and traveling and the fact that you don't have much control over your party's actions – basically, don't come into Miitopia expecting Final Fantasy V. Hopefully, Nintendo and Grezzo will be making a few more quality-of-life improvements along with the changes already announced. And given Grezzo's track record, it should turn out great! **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & GREZZO RELEASE: MAY 21, 2021 RATING: E

DC SUPER HERO GIRLS: TEEN POWER

Selfies, shopping and superpowers. Spectacular!

BATMAN AND SUPERMAN used to the biggest names in the DC universe by a supersized margin, but while they're still iconic Men with bright futures ahead of them, recent years have driven the comic company's female faces to gain greater fame. DC's women haven't taken center stage in many games, though – but they'll be catching up in that area soon enough, starting with the Switch-exclusive DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power.

It's an adaptation of the DC Super Hero Girls cartoon revamp spear-headed by Lauren Faust (My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic), and it's got a look to match. While the visuals aren't "super" technically impressive, the dev team has done a great job at making these 2D characters look right in 3D. The same bold, simple shapes that give them so much personality in the show carry forward nicely into the world of polygons, with little being lost in the translation. You can tell exactly who these girls are at a glance, making it easy to jump right in and become them.

Speaking of who, you can expect to take control of (at least) three of the main super friends from the show, and you know that they'll all have great gameplay chemistry. Batgirl will be able to create crimefighting gadgets, Wonder Woman will wield her classic sword, shield and lasso combo and Supergirl will lean into her alien powers like super strength, freezing breath and heat vision. No word yet on whether we'll be able to step into the boots of the toon's other three leading ladies – Bumblebee, Zatanna and Green Lantern – but they'll all appear in supporting roles in the story for sure.

Between taking on enemies like giant robots and evil teddy bears, you'll be able to do a little open-world exploring, with opportunities to meet up with friends . . . and potential foes like Catwoman, Star Sapphire, Poison Ivy, Giganta, Livewire and, of course, Harley Quinn. It's not clear if they'll be the villains of the game or potential partners in crimefighting. Some of the threats here look like they may have come from Darkseid, DC's death-loving big bad! If he and his goons are on the scene, that would be more than enough reason to bring the DC Super Hero and Super Villain Girls together against a common enemy.

When not bashing bad guys, you can boost the Metropolis economy by shopping for new outfits. It looks like there will be a wide range of new duds to pick up – and, for whatever reason, the reality warping imp Bat-Mite appears in the store's menu screen.

Photography factors in as well, as you can strike a pose whenever you please, take some selfies and post them on in-game social media for likes and comments. (The interface seems fairly versatile!) Finally, you can hop into Barry Allen's bake shop to pig out on sweets, putting that teenage metabolism to the ultimate test!

The developers at Toybox are being tested too. Deadly Premonition 2, their last title on Switch, had its fair share of performance issues. Let's hope that with Nintendo in the publisher's chair, they're able to put out something fans of all ages will love when the game is released on June 4! **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: TOYBOX
RELEASE: JUNE 4, 2021 RATING: E10+

YS IX: MONSTRUM NOX

In which Adol the Red is reborn as the Crimson King!

YS SERIES PROTAGONIST Adol Christin never shies away from an adventure, even when it starts with him detained in jail and gifted with strange powers. That's where Adol and his trusted confidant Dogi find themselves in Nihon Falcom's Ys IX: Monstrum Nox, the latest entry in their long-running action RPG saga.

Monstrum Nox takes place in a new setting: the annexed city of Balduq. The city has plenty of secrets, including Monstrums (beings gifted with supernatural powers), and Grimwald Nox, an alternate dimension where Monstrums fight off evil spirits.

Adol joins forces with other Monstrums after becoming one himself, and they each have unique weapons, skillsets and exploration abilities called Monstrum Gifts.

As of now, there's no Ys IX demo for the Switch, but I did take the PS4 demo for a spin to test out the game's combat and exploration.

In the demo, you can explore two largely vertical environments. Traversing them requires you to use the different Monstrum Gifts you have at your disposal. For example, Adol's gift allows you to teleport in certain areas where you see glowing red lights.

You can control three characters at a time and switch between them freely. It was fun to experiment with their different fighting styles. Adol has his signature sword and employs some fire-based magic. The pink-haired axe wielder Raging Bull attacks slower, but she packs a powerful punch. Hawk, who wields dual blades, shoots around the battlefield with great speed. While their differences don't matter much against weaker enemies, I realized that knowing the characters' specific skills (and when to use them) was important in the boss fights, which were challenging.

Even though this demo showed only a small slice of what Ys IX has to offer, I enjoyed what I played. The fast-paced combat and varied exploration kept me invested and entertained, and I'm excited to see how Adol's latest adventure will turn out! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: T

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 1 + 2

The Birdman flies again!

NOSTALGIA TOOK HOLD of both my heart and my wallet last year when Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2 was first revealed for Xbox One, PC and PlayStation 4. A flood of memories of the good times I'd had in college playing those first few Tony Hawk titles washed away my senses and swept $39.99 (plus tax) out of my bank account as I instantly invested in a PS4 copy of the release. I should have waited! Because now it's been announced that the same 2-in-1 combo of remakes is skating its way to the Switch.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater was a true multiplatform sensation of a series that kicked off around the turn of the millennium – its first installments shipped on Nintendo 64, PlayStation and Dreamcast, with a few portable off-shoots in the mix as well. Being available to all gamers regardless of which platform they primarily pledged their loyalty to, the series soared above the console wars and became beloved by all.

. . . Until a few too many sequels of questionable quality destroyed all that good will. This combined remake of the brand's first two games brings it back to basics, but with a gorgeous visual upgrade.

If you've never played a Tony Hawk game, they're somewhat realistic but somewhat outlandish skateboarding sims that mostly play out as score attack challenges. You've given a few minutes on the clock and an environment to skate around in – you do your best to string together sequences of wild tricks and high-flying stunts to rack up as many points as you can before the countdown hits 0.

It's addictive, arcade-y action and it's just as fun today as it first was in my dorm room in 1999. (Don't give me that look – I know I'm getting old.) **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION DEVELOPER: VICARIOUS VISIONS RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: T

SCREENSHOTS FROM THE PLAYSTATION 4 VERSION

RUNE FACTORY 5

A total overhaul in style is in store for this series!

IT'S BEEN NINE long years, but the next Rune Factory is finally sprouting on the Nintendo Switch. Original developer Neverland filed for bankruptcy in 2013, despite Rune Factory 4's original release on the Nintendo 3DS being the fastest-selling title in the franchise. Luckily, many of the former developers were hired by publisher Marvelous, who announced that Rune Factory 5 was in the works at the same time they announced the release of Rune Factory 4 Special.

With the formal jump from the 3DS to the Switch, the series has switched from an overhead to an isometric perspective for navigation, farming and battle. We've already seen a gorgeous view of the town of Rigbarth, a sandy beach, tree-lined avenues and perilous dungeons, along with your farm – which is on the back of a flying dragon! Main character Ares (male) or Alice (female) arrives in town after losing their memory, and are recruited as a member of Seed, a group of rangers and peacekeepers. Working for Seed and fulfilling villager requests allows you to unlock festivals and crafting skills, much like the Orders from Rune Factory 4.

As with previous titles, your hero can develop both platonic and romantic relationships with fellow villagers, and can also bring them into battle as an ally for flashy combo moves. There's also a new special ability – Seed Circle – that allows you to restrain monsters or temporarily turn them into your allies. While many of Rune Factory's mechanics are being upgraded and reworked for this new installment, the developers have stated that this will be designed for both newbies and veterans alike. Not only that, if you have Rune Factory 4 Special save data on your Switch, you'll be able to unlock exclusive costumes and a couple of new allies.

No Western release date yet, but Rune Factory 5 will be out on May 21 in Japan. **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS (XSEED)
RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: RP

MONSTER HUNTER STORIES 2: WINGS OF RUIN

The toon-styled spin-off scores a sequel on the Switch.

YOU KNOW A series has really "made it" when it starts to get spin-offs, and Monster Hunter reached that point a few years ago with the release of Monster Hunter Stories on the 3DS. Intended as kind of a beginner's MonHun experience and entryway into the larger franchise for a younger audience, Stories soared with great gameplay and bold, cartoon-style visuals. In fact, it inspired an actual cartoon! The anime, Monster Hunter Stories: Ride On, aired until 2018 and had an impressive 75 episodes.

All that to say, this sequel felt like an inevitability. Sure enough, Stories 2 is on its way, and it's flying to the Switch in the States this July.

The "Hunter" part of the name is a bit out of place in this spin-off series, since the gameplay here is not about killing any giant beasts. Rather, you befriend them.

More than just becoming friends with monsters, though, your hero forms such a strong bond that they allow you to hop on their backs and become a Monster Rider. The hero of Stories 2 is descended from a legendary Rider named Red, so it'll be up to you to live up to the family legend!

You'll also be fighting against the prejudice of the population, though. In this version of Stories, the Rathalos species has seemingly gone extinct – perhaps having been hunted to that point by past generations who feared Rathalos in particular and saw no value in them as potential Rider partners. You are given what may be the world's last Rathalos egg, though, and must raise the young Ratha to prove all the naysayers wrong!

Monster Hunter Stories 2, like its predecessor on 3DS, will feature turn-based battles that are easier to grasp than the main series' real-time combat. If that sounds good to you, keep an eye on July! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: JULY 9, 2021 RATING: E10+

POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND & SHINING PEARL

A more traditional return to Sinnoh.

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARIES are better known as silver anniversaries, but not for The Pokémon Company — they're celebrating with diamonds and pearls! Brilliant Diamonds and Shining Pearls to be exact, as remakes of the Generation IV Pokémon titles are set to hit the Switch later this year. They've been part of the rumor mill for quite some time, and seeing Sinnoh confirmed twice in one day (flip back to Page 26!) was a pretty awesome anniversary gift, if you ask me!

ENCORE

First released worldwide in 2007, Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl were the first Pokémon titles on the Nintendo DS, taking full advantage of its dual displays, touchscreen mechanics, Game Boy Advance backwards compatibility and built-in Wi-Fi. Taking place in the Sinnoh region (loosely based on Japan's Hokkaido Prefecture), the main characters and their rival choose from the Fire-type Chimchar, Grass-type Turtwig and Water-type Piplup to begin their journey, then challenge eight Gyms and the Sinnoh Elite Four while collecting data in their Pokédex and foiling Team Galactic's world domination plot.

A few play features from Ruby & Sapphire made updated appearances in Diamond & Pearl: Super Contests, where Pokémon could strut their stuff for prestige and prizes, and The Underground, where players could establish a secret base, dig up fossils and interact with others through local wireless. But the biggest feature of all was online connectivity! With the Global Trade Station, you could trade Pokémon with anyone across the world (sometimes netting a foreign language Pokédex entry in the process!) and battle other players online with the Wi-Fi Battle feature, including officially sanctioned tournaments. After only being limited to mobile phone users in Japan with Pokémon Crystal, Pokémon had finally made its first steps online worldwide!

Generation IV also marked the first introduction of a few new fan-favorite characters and Pokémon, such as the recurring International Police detective Looker, future Smash fighter Lucario and movie mascots such as Manaphy and Giratina.

BATON PASS

Instead of being developed directly by Game Freak, these Diamond & Pearl remakes are being developed by ILCA, under the direction of ILCA's Yuichi Ueda and Game Freak's Junichi Masuda. Not only are they the developers of both iterations of Pokémon HOME, but they have also contributed to games in other storied franchises, such as Dragon Quest XI and Ace Combat 7.

One of ILCA's stylistic decisions met with some mixed reviews after the initial trailer reveal: Instead of going for the same art and character style used in other remakes and Sword & Shield, ILCA is faithfully reproducing the original pixel graphics of Sinnoh via 3D models — turning our main characters Dawn, Lucas and Barry into "chibi" versions like you'd expect to see as plushies in a UFO catcher. Battles are anything but cute and tiny, though — there, everyone's portrayed in the proper proportions.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: ILCA RELEASE: LATE 2021 RATING: RP

CONVERSION
In the years since the first release of Diamond & Pearl, there have been a bunch of changes to the franchise, from the addition of the Fairy type in X & Y to the many changes made in Sword & Shield, such as the changes to the Pokémon movepool, where invalid moves are shown in Pokémon HOME with yellow caution sign icons.

One change I'm curious to see is to Unown, which were encountered in Sinnoh at the Solaceon Ruins. Before Sword & Shield, they were only capable of performing the move Hidden Power (an attack dependent on a Pokémon's base stats) which has been depreciated with the addition of Fairy type and the move to the Switch. There were also changes made between Diamond & Pearl and their third version, Platinum, to various special Pokémon such as Rotom, but at least one of these changes has been confirmed: During the trailer, an NPC that only appeared in Pokémon Platinum was spotted in Floaroma Town, and her function was to give you the Gracidea Flower that unlocks the Mythical Pokémon Shaymin's Sky Forme if you showed one to her.

Another change that would be beneficial to gameplay: the addition of more Fire-types to the Sinnoh region. Unless you decided on Chimchar as your starter, Fire-types were some of the least represented in Sinnoh, with only Ponyta able to be found in the wild before your battle against the Elite Four.

FUTURE SIGHT
The biggest Donphan in the room: What will we miss by going from two screens to one? Battling and navigation made a successful leap back to the single-screen format with Sword & Shield, but one of Diamond & Pearl's major features was the Pokétch, a wearable computer with several apps (like a daycare status checker and mini maps) that was displayed on the lower DS screen. Hopefully Poffin making can be adapted to motion and Joy-Con controls similar to Curry making in Sword & Shield, but there are two other activities that used the touch-screen heavily: Super Contests involved a rhythm game as well as dragging various accessories onto Pokémon in order to appeal to the judges, and The Underground's fossil digging minigame involved tapping the lower screen to break items free from their rocky tombs. Converting those will take some extra effort.

There's still much more yet to be revealed, and hopefully Game Freak's faith in ILCA will be greatly rewarded later this year, when Dialga, Palkia and Giratina roar across time, space and the dimensions to make their return.
— REBECCA

MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH

Get ready to hit the links running!

GOLF IS RATHER notorious for being the slowest of sports, but Nintendo has taken slowness to an extreme with the Mario Golf series. Nearly 18 years between console releases (and not even a "New Play Control!" Wii version in the interim)? That's just *too* slow.

Perhaps that's why the theme of the newest Mario Golf game is centered around speed. Mario Golf: Super Rush is so focused on picking up the pace, the Chinese version of the game has Rush in its title *three* times!

The greatest emphasis on this is in the new Speed Golf mode. Waiting for other players to take their turn? Too slow! Now everyone is rushing around after their ball at the same time, racing to not only get theirs into the hole in the fewest strokes, but also in the shortest time.

Caddies? Who has time for caddies? Everyone just brings their bags with them as they rush across the grass, desert, misty forest and probably other landscapes making up the various courses found therein. Item shops? No time! Just grab something along the way, like an Ice Flower that will allow you to quickly glide across the top of the greens like it's the 1989 Mario Ice Capades (look it up on YouTube). Different characters will also have their own dashes and special shots, like Yoshi logrolling atop one of his eggs (eggrolling?).

Of course, if you'd rather take your time and enjoy a more leisurely trip around 18 holes, Super Rush has you covered there, too. And for the first time ever in a Mario Golf game, you can eschew button inputs to take advantage of the sensors in the Switch's Joy-Cons to emulate swinging a real golf club with motion controls (thanks for that, lack-of-a-"New Play Control!"-release-of-Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour). Features like shot gauges will also show you the trajectory your ball will follow due to elements such as slopes being in the way, or being able to scout and scan the terrain on your current hole.

On top of all that, there's the brand-new Story Mode! Something of a staple of the handheld iterations, this feature comes to consoles for the first time in Super Rush. In this mode, you'll get to use a Mii character as your aspiring golf pro, increase your skills from rookie to champion and interact with characters from Mario's world along the way. As you progress, you'll earn experience points that you can then use to allot skill points into different categories, ranging from Power, Stamina and Speed to how straight you can hit the ball and how much spin you put on it. You can even "spin" your Mii off from the story and have them participate in other modes as well. (Between this and the revival of Miitopia, Miis are making quite an unexpected comeback here in 2021!)

Oh, and also worth pointing out is that for the first time ever, it's not just the ladies who are sporting appropriate attire on the green. As we've seen in other titles, such as Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and Mario Tennis Aces, Mario and friends are now dressed to impress at this Mushroom Kingdom country club (see if those cleats don't help your swing a bit, guys). We're looking forward to seeing the full set of new outfits worn by the whole cast, but the current snazziest is Wario's. (See Page 3.)

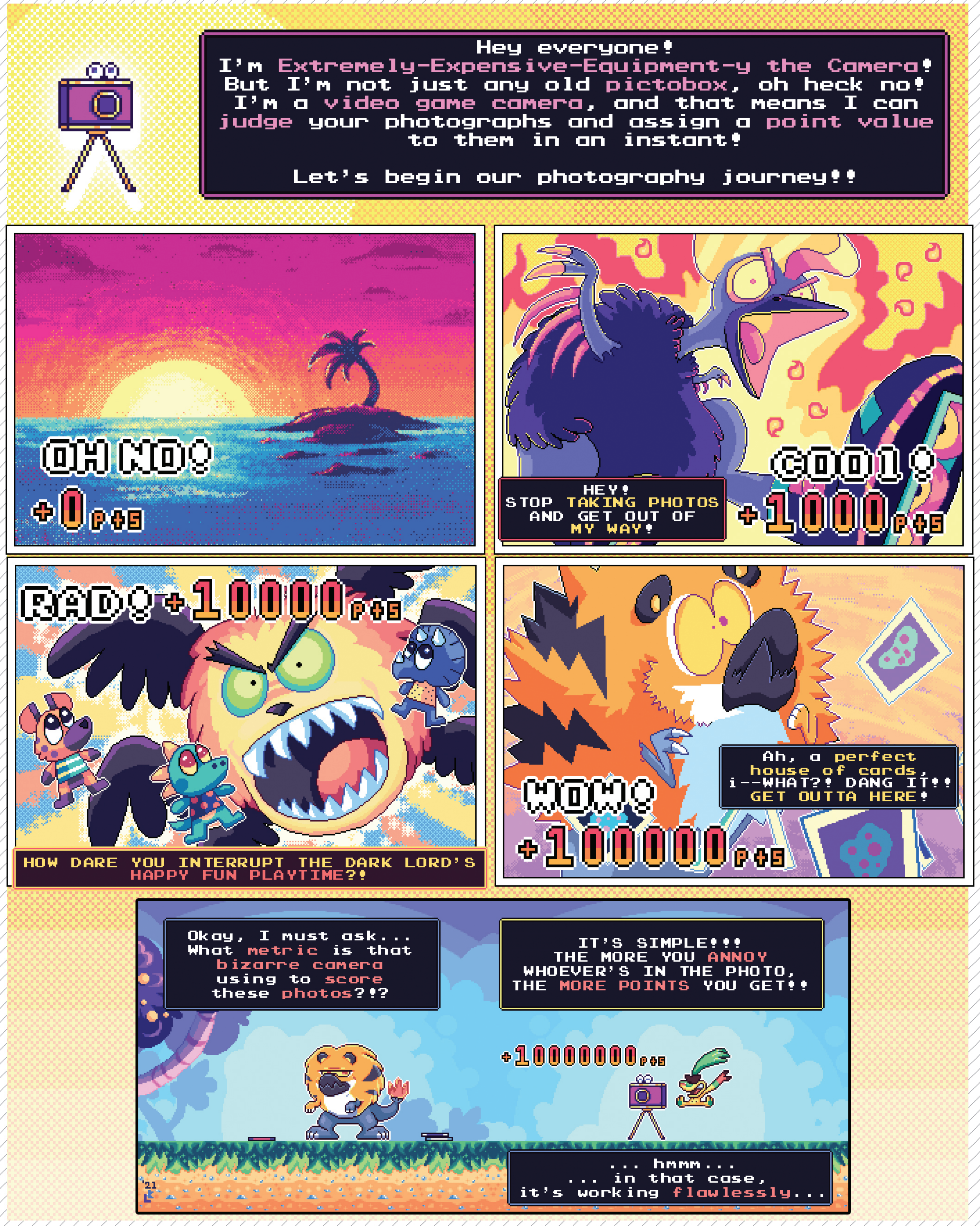
Finally, it's worth noting that up to four players can tee off locally or online. While it's anyone's guess how well the fast-paced Speed Golf will fare with Nintendo's sometimes sluggish online architecture, the traditional "slow" modes should be perfect when played on the web which spans widely across the world. **— DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CAMELOT
RELEASE: JUNE 25, 2021 RATING: E

REST 0

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK



BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

It's been over two decades since the launch of the first Pokémon Snap, and a whole lot has happened since then – especially when it comes to the collision of video games and photography! Let's retrace the steps that brought us to this point, shall we? This is . . .

THE PATH TO New Pokémon SNAP™

THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURE

RELEASED LESS THAN a year after the Pokémon series' American debut on the monochromatic Game Boy, Pokémon Snap built on the momentum of Red & Blue and played a critical role in establishing an early understanding of the brand. Except this time, Trainers weren't capturing Pokémon through battle – they were capturing them on film!

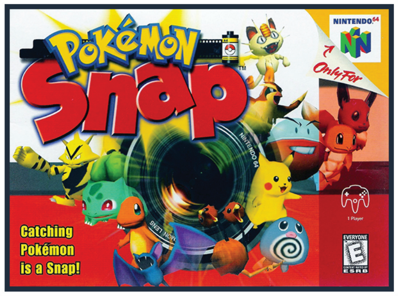
Players took on the role of ace photographer Todd Snap (also seen in a brief arc during the anime series), as he catalogued photos of wild Pokémon in order to complete Professor Oak's Pokémon Report. The gameplay offered players a vibrant, first-person, 3D perspective of the Pokémon world, riding along a literal railway and snapping photos along the way.

It may not seem revolutionary today, but in 1999, taking full control of a working virtual camera represented a total sea change in game design – it gave players a new way to interact with Pokémon outside of combat and offered an intimate look at a more peaceful and natural side of the franchise.

Through the lens of a camera, players captured candid moments with various Pokémon across a variety of biomes, including a riverside jungle, an abandoned factory and a mystical cave. While it was easy to spy a Bulbasaur enjoying a snack in its natural environment, eagle-eyed shutterbugs could catch even rarer shots like a surfboarding Pikachu or a Magikarp in the middle of evolving! And while beauty might be in the eye of the beholder, Professor Oak proved to be a harsher critic, offering up a skill rating on any photos submitted after each voyage.

While Pokémon Snap did not feature all 151 Pokémon that existed at that time, it still proved quite a feat to photograph each of the 63 varieties that were included. In addition to his trusty camera, Todd came armed with food, Pester Balls and a Poké Flute to coax unique poses out of each species and solve seriously tricky environmental puzzles.

Pokémon Snap also made a mainstream impact with a tie-in promotion with Blockbuster Video in the States where players could bring their cartridge to an in-store kiosk and actually print out stickers of their favorite photos! A few of these kiosks now live in the homes of ardent collectors, but the Wii Virtual Console re-release actually kept the feature alive by letting players use the Wii's built-in messaging system to send digital photos to friends. It's too bad that Blockbuster couldn't survive to see the sequel! **— JOHN-CHARLES**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: JULY 26, 1999
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY

PLAYING IT TODAY

Though we've had to wait for over two decades for a sequel, the original game has thankfully remained readily available. Nintendo gave it a re-release by way of the Wii Virtual Console service in 2007, then a second encore appearance in the Wii U eShop in 2017. The Wii Shop is closed, but Wii U's is still open, so $9.99 will let you revisit this piece of the past there.

PHOTO HEROES

POKÉMON SNAP ISN'T the only series to put players behind the lens with a specific mission at hand, and like photography, these games and their photo heroes exhibit different styles and goals. Let's pop off the lens cap and take a look back!

Armed with a camera and martial arts prowess, Jade from 2003's Beyond Good & Evil uses her skills as a shutterbug to expose an alien conspiracy in the year 2435. You can use Jade's photography to collect evidence and document different alien species as you traverse the mining planet of Hillys in this cult classic action/adventure game from Ubisoft.

While searching for a hot scoop in Colorado, photojournalist Frank West must fight off zombies and investigate their origin in 2006's Dead Rising from Capcom. Like many survival horror games, Frank's resources are limited, so he has to make his photos count while capturing the experiences of a massive zombie outbreak. Fortunately for Frank, his photos allow him to earn Prestige Points, which are used to upgrade his skills and weapons throughout the game.

In 2015's Life Is Strange, aspiring photographer Max Caulfield gets more than she bargained for when she returns to her hometown of Arcadia Bay, Oregon, and gains the power to rewind time after a tragic event. This episodic adventure from Dontnod and Square Enix features opportunities where Max can take photos as she explores Arcadia Bay. However, photography plays a much deeper role in the game as you discover the possible dark connections artists can have to their work. (We just need this series on Switch now!)

Finally, Peter Parker may be Spider-Man by night, but he's still a photojournalist by day, and I'd be remiss if I didn't mention him in our list of photo heroes. When Spidey isn't saving the streets of Manhattan in 2007's Spider-Man 3 or 2012's The Amazing Spider-Man from Activision, you can take on photo missions and get shots that only a web-slinger can! **— MAGGIE**

THE DS GETS AN EYE

NINTENDO'S SECOND DS revision sported a bevy of updates, ranging from the awesome (a brand-new digital store!) to the not-so-awesome (so long, GBA compatibility!). But the most prominent new feature – as indicated by the third letter tacked on the end of the DSi's name – was the pair of outer and inner cameras built right into the clamshell.

Smartphones were only just starting to come into vogue in the late 2000s, so the inclusion of camera capabilities on a far more affordable gaming device was a significant boon. Sure, the 0.3-megapixel resolution was considered poor even at the time, but that didn't stop players from having a laugh with the built-in editing tools to contort their friends' faces or bedazzle their photos with glittery stickers.

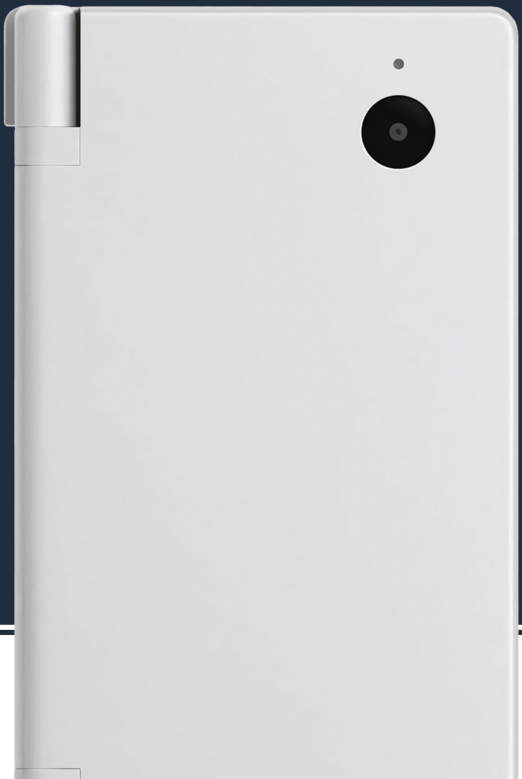
Then, of course, came the software to capitalize on the latest Nintendo hardware gimmick. A smattering of titles tried to incorporate the cameras in novel ways, but for the most part these experiments were about as shallow as a half-filled wading pool for children.

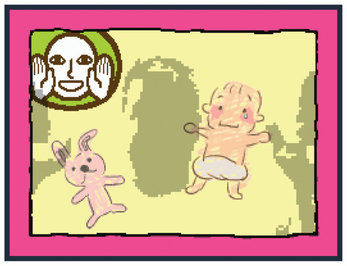
Launching alongside the machine was WarioWare: Snapped!, a DSiWare-exclusive installment in Wario's minigame cavalcade. Using the inner camera, players' silhouettes would directly interact with in-game objects – swat a fly, eat a baguette, play peekaboo with a baby, etc. However, variety was lacking at but a paltry 20 microgames in total, and the need to pantomime using both hands for many of them meant playing Snapped! required setting the DSi on a table and sitting at an optimal distance.

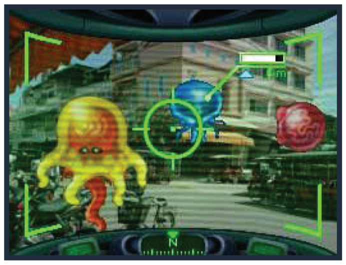
How about System Flaw, the first DSi-exclusive game to be sold at retail? It was an augmented reality first-person shooter in which players zapped aliens floating around the physical environment. The flat 2D sprites never fooled anyone into thinking these critters were really there, though, and the limited modes meant the ride was over almost as soon as it began.

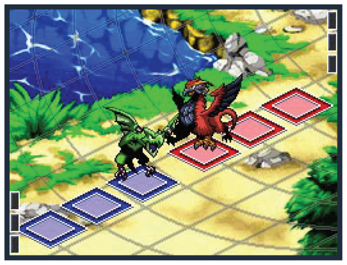
Foto Showdown, a Pokémon clone featuring three-on-three monster battles, was a bit more ambitious than those previous examples. The hook was that monsters were captured by taking photos of real-world objects, but the limited tech meant that the type of creature you'd acquire was entirely determined by the dominant color in the picture you snapped. Might as well just point the camera at a book of color swatches and nothing else!

And finally there was Photo Dojo, perhaps the most fun and intuitive of the camera-centric lot. It was a fighter starring digitized versions of friends and family. You snapped a set of attack and defense poses per character, then unleashed them like low-rent Mortal Kombat. It was simple yet hilarious, hampered only by the fact that it was designed to merely be a quick diversion and not some deep Evo candidate. **– TONY**









SELFIES & SIDEQUESTS

SO MANY GAME worlds are so beautiful, and we love the characters that reside in them. No wonder we also love when those characters are able to take selfies to show off their adventures within those worlds!

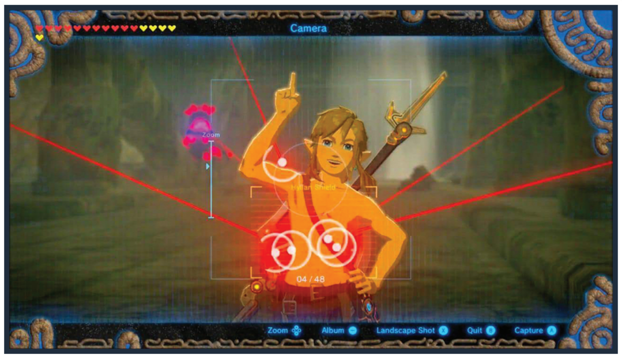
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD added selfies back in 2013, and you could even change Link's expression before each shot. While players couldn't easily share the selfies, it kicked off a trend in gaming. Once most systems allowed quick sharing to various social media platforms, the idea of the video game selfie really caught on, with most games offering a fun mode to capture funny, crazy or even gorgeous shots of these virtual spaces and beings.

Breath of the Wild expanded the Link selfie with the ability to pose Link and snap from various angles. Mario got in on the fun with Super Mario Odyssey, allowing pictures to be taken and even filters to be added. Super Smash Bros. Ultimate held contests to see who could take the best in-game pic. You can even take photos with Pokémon in Pokémon GO!

The trend has extended well beyond just Nintendo's corner of the industry, too. Some of the most popular PlayStation games to see selfie modes included are Insomniac's Spider-Man, Square Enix's Kingdom Hearts III, Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed Origins, Capcom's Dead Rising 4 and Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto V.

Some games have even built sidequests around taking in-game pictures or selfies. Do you remember collecting the Banana Fairies in Donkey Kong 64? In Metal Gear Solid, you could reveal developer secrets with the camera. Breath of the Wild gave you a photo of someplace in Hyrule to track down and re-create. Mario Kart Tour has minigames in which you take a selfie of your driver with two other drivers going off a jump. In South Park: The Fractured But Whole, Cartman gives you missions to get selfies with fellow residents.

These fun camera modes add depth and entertainment to the games while also gaining each game more notoriety, as the selfies flood places like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. It's a win-win! **— BRETT**



THE THIRD DIMENSION

THE NINTENDO 3DS was Nintendo's first *successful* foray into 3D gaming, but this little system had a lot under the hood that contributed to its success. What we're focusing on are the two tiny cameras on the front: Not only did they allow you to take 3D photos and video, but they could also bring the action into the real world!

Face Raiders came pre-installed on every 3DS, and was developed by HAL to showcase all the capabilities of the fledgling system: gyroscopic motion sensors, stereoscopic 3D visuals and augmented reality. With your 3DS as your cockpit, you shot down enemy UFOs with the faces of people (captured with your 3DS' front cameras) as they attacked you from all directions, turning your surroundings into a battlefield. They could even use rubble from the background against you!

Another fun title that combined AR with photography was the eShop-exclusive Chibi-Robo! Photo Finder. Our little metal housekeeping friend with the electrical plug tail now has a new job: finding NostalJunk for display in the Curator's museum! You're given a snippet of silhouette film and tasked to find an object that matches its shape, such as an electrical outlet or a CD. Snap a picture, and if it's accurate enough, Chibi-Robo will "take" the object back to display.

There were some other memorable titles that took advantage of the 3DS' AR capabilities, such as Pokémon Dream Radar and Fatal Frame spin-off Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir, which came with a physical "Diary of Faces" that summoned specters for you to fight.

On the photography side, Sparkle Snapshots 3D (from Style Savvy developers SynSophia) brought the Japanese "print club" experience to the handheld, and Konami's Metal Gear Solid 3D let you use photos to give Snake's uniform a custom camouflage pattern. Nintendo also released a free Photos with Mario AR photo app that was compatible with specially marked Nintendo eShop cards featuring Mario, Luigi, Peach and a Goomba. **— REBECCA**

THE Wii U COULD SEE YOU

BY FUSING GYRO-ENABLED motion controls with an embedded camera, the Wii U GamePad told the world right out of the gate that it was "aiming" for all-new heights of immersive video game weirdness. It was also the ultimate controller for aspiring shutterbugs! From taking zombified selfies in ZombiU to the pre-recorded Panorama View videos that allowed you to see the world from a full 360 degrees, early adopters of the console had tons of picture-taking fun to brag about.

Turning the camera on yourself then flipping it around to view in-game worlds through the lens of the GamePad's second screen quickly became a regular part of the Wii U experience. In Wii Fit U, you could snap a shot of your face after every workout to track how skinny (or not so skinny) your mug was looking, and Game & Wario featured a game in which you used the GamePad screen to find and photograph specific NPCs on their TVs.

Maybe the system's most intense use of camera controls came with Wii U Chat, the Skype-like app that came for free with every Wii U purchase – but, sadly, no one seemed to use it! Fans had complained for years that Nintendo wasn't "online" enough. Then in 2012, they offered built-in, totally free video calls, and the response was . . . crickets. This is why we can't have nice things, Nintendo fans!

Wii U Chat closed down in 2017, alongside Miiverse, Nintendo's stab at their own social networking site. But before that, they still hadn't given up on camera games on the console. There was also Fatal Frame: Maiden of Black Water (detailed on Page 50) and more famously, Star Fox Guard, a spin-off game featuring the ever-lovable, always-shootable Slippy Toad and his mustachioed uncle Grippy. The brainchild of Shigeru Miyamoto himself, the game came packed in with the initial retail run of Star Fox Zero, challenging players to control a series of security cameras in an effort to spot invading robots before they stormed your base.

It was an interesting exercise in multitasking, but like the whole Star Fox Zero project, it torpedoed pretty quickly, leaving fans to wonder if Nintendo's days toying with camera-based gameplay were over. That's just part of why we're so overjoyed to get New Pokémon Snap! Not only does it mark the return of an N64 favorite, but it also means that Nintendo's love of photo-based adventures is still "developing." **– JONATHAN**

CAPTURING CONVENIENCE

AND SO WE arrive at the current generation, with the Nintendo Switch. As the hybrid successor to both the portable hardware line (which included cameras in the DSi and all versions of the 3DS) as well as the Wii U (which included a camera in the GamePad), a natural assumption would have been that the Switch would have some kind of camera itself.

It doesn't!

Instead, the Switch continues the evolution of overlap of video games and photography with an all-new button on its controllers: the Capture Button!

This wonderful little circle-in-a-square button is placed nonprominently on the bottom of the leftside Joy-Con, as well as hovering in the middle of the Pro Controller, drawing no attention to itself. But it's full of power and potential!

Tapping the Capture Button while playing the Switch instantly takes a picture of whatever's currently seen on the screen, saving it in the Switch Album for you to go back and look at later. (The action of snapshotting the screen is even accompanied by a brief camera shutter sound effect, so you'll know you got your shot.) What's more, holding Capture down for a few seconds will activate a secondary feature: saving a video of your last 30 seconds' worth of gameplay. (In most titles.)

Both the 3DS and Wii U systems let users save screenshots, but not nearly as conveniently as this — there's no need to make a Miiverse post to preserve your moments, making the process faster, and you can tap, tap, tap away as much as you want, saving screenshots until the cows come home (so long as you have enough free storage space, of course). Then, from the Album, you can review your snaps, lightly edit them and post them to social media.

It's a community-building innovation, but one that Nintendo can't take credit for: Sony's PlayStation 4 paved the way with its Share Button in 2013. They were the first to see the social shift gaming was taking and to recognize the need to streamline the sharing experience by introducing a dedicated button.

Still, though Nintendo didn't conquer this particular territory first, the Capture Button is a joy. And more and more games are taking advantage of it by including Photo Modes to help set up shots before Capture is pressed . . . with varying degrees of effort. Monster Hunter Rise, for instance, features a capable Photo Mode that lets you adjust angles and position, while Balan Wonderworld merely freezes the current view and lets you apply various frames. Oh well! It seems like there's still room for further evolution. **— LUCAS**

New Pokémon Snap™

AFTER TRAVELING ALONG the path to a Pokémon Snap sequel for 21 years, nine months and four days, patient, long-suffering fans have finally arrived at the end point of the journey: the release of New Pokémon Snap. With so much video game industry history having happened in the interim, an evolution to the gameplay established in the original adventure can be expected. But before zooming in on what's different, let's fix our focus on what's remained the same.

New Pokémon Snap once again casts you in the role of a budding young photographer. At the behest of a professor, you venture into the wild to take pictures of Pokémon in their natural habitats. You ride along a set path, slowly making your way through various environments while constantly keeping your head on a swivel – because wild Pokémon displaying interesting behaviors could pop up around you at any time. After taking the best snapshots possible on each short trek, you return to the professor at his home base to present your pics and have him evaluate the quality of each one.

Then you do it all over again.

That engaging and addictive core gameplay loop is a big reason why the original Pokémon Snap has been so beloved for over two decades, so it's understandable that this sequel is keeping that structure entirely intact. Photographing Pokémon in the wild could work in a few other ways – perhaps as the series continues to explore open worlds as in the just-revealed Pokémon Legends: Arceus, taking photos will be implemented there, as in Breath of the Wild. But for Snap? Riding along "on rails" in a vehicle still makes the most sense.

I say "on rails" in implied air quotes since that's the first difference from the first Snap. Back on the N64, our vehicle the ZERO-ONE trundled along on physical rails the likes of which a train would use – they were built into each environment, and as such would often show up in your snapshots. But here in New Pokémon Snap, our new vehicle is the NEO-ONE, and it's a snazzy, futuristic hovercraft that doesn't require a tangible road to run along. Instead, the pathway is projected holographically as each photo safari begins – then it fades out of view entirely, leaving the environment untouched and your photographs unmarred by any man-made trail in each idyllic, untouched setting.

Another critical difference this time around is the fact that the NEO-ONE isn't limited to land as the ZERO-ONE was. Some levels will involve traveling beyond the shores of the Lental region's islands in order to scope out the Pokémon swimming on the ocean surface . . . and under it! The NEO-ONE is fully submersible, so you can expect to dive down into the depths of the sea to see what lies beneath. Did you know that out of all 18 different types of Pokémon, Water-type is the most common classification? It's a population that's just too large to ignore, so New Pokémon Snap just had to figure out a way to go under the waves.

Even more flexibility will be introduced through the use of the new Scan feature. As you approach what appear to be forks in the road while you move along, you can scan the scene and sometimes find an option to begin moving along an alternate path! That'll be a big boost for replayability in this sequel, as Snap 1 kept each level pretty well locked down to the same single path every time you entered it. There are sure to be some extra special Pokémon lurking on the road less traveled!

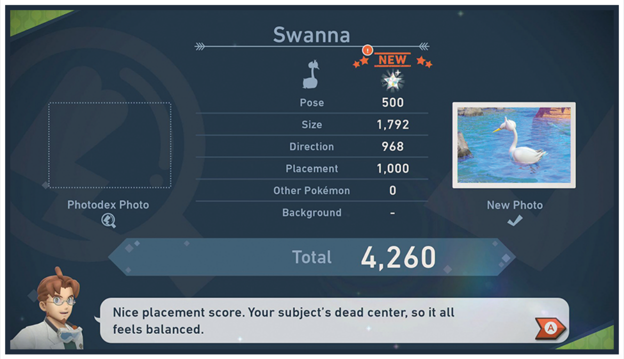
Scanning can also give you clues about how you might get hidden Pokémon to appear, or how you might get already visible Pokémon to exhibit different behaviors – because this isn't a hands-off photo safari. You're fully encouraged to actively influence the action in each environment to set up better shots than you would have otherwise been able to snap if you just cruised along.

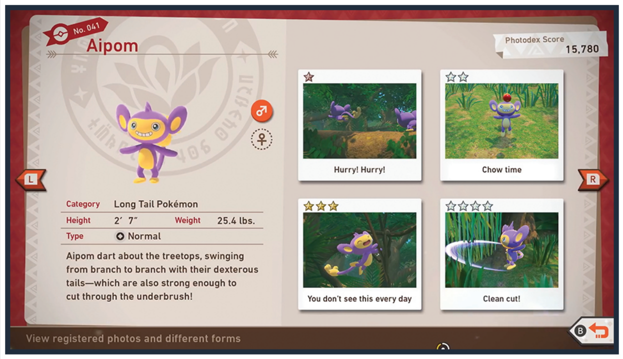
Activating a scan is just one way to interact, and it's the most minimally invasive option – some Pokémon may react to the noise the scanner makes and become more curious about you. More impactful? Feeding the wildlife! Just as in the original Snap, you can once again toss apples (or "Fluffruit," as the game officially names them) to fill hungry creatures' bellies and get them into a happier mood, ready to smile for the camera.

Tossing food isn't always about offering a snack, though – sometimes a well-placed piece of fruit can direct a Pokémon's attention to something else in the environment, causing them to interact with it. See how Pikachu is ignoring the Fluffruit above because she's been encouraged to examine the little shovel in the sand instead? (Watch out for Sandygast, Pikachu!)

Next up, another difference from Snap 1. That first game featured Pester Balls, another option of an object to toss that was meant to anger or annoy Pokémon in the wild – tossing a Pester Ball just right could set up a shot of an aggressive, attacking Pokémon. New Snap is taking a kinder, gentler approach, though. Its second tossing option is the all-new Illumina Orb, a bulb of glowing energy that causes any creature it strikes to light up with beautiful bioluminescence! The Pokémon you cause to glow will be surprised, and that shock should set up some great snapshots.

Finally, never underestimate the power of music. There are plenty of Pokémon who would appreciate hearing a song as you move the NEO-ONE along, so it's equipped with the ability to play a Melody. Species like the Bellossom seen below will perk up, start moving to the rhythm and may even decide to dance! Capturing that kind of behavior will surely please the professor.



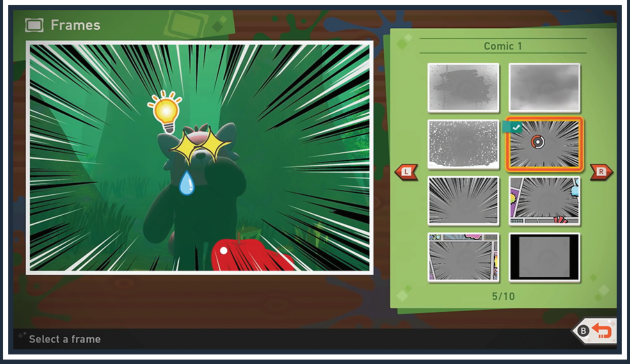


Back when Pokémon Snap launched in 1999, the only professor we'd ever seen in the series was Professor Oak – so, for Snap, he appeared again to serve in the role of photo rater. Nearly 22 years later, the Pokémon world is overflowing with academic professionals, and spin-offs are no longer afraid of introducing brand-new characters never seen before in the main series of games. So New Pokémon Snap presents the new Professor Mirror!

Primarily, this professor echoes his predecessor in that he's mostly here to critique your work. Each photo you present to him at the end of an expedition is evaluated on a variety of criteria, including how centered in the frame you managed to get the Pokémon, how close of a zoom you achieved, whether they were facing the camera or not and what kind of behavior they were displaying. (If they're just sitting still, that's not as exciting as snapping a shot of them in the middle of a dynamic action like them using an attack.) You'll want to snap shots of actions both energetic and mundane, though, because of something new Mirror does that Oak didn't: rating photos from one to four stars. Your goal is to not only snap shots of each species, but also complete a full set of one-, two-, three- and four-star rated photos for each different kind of creature.

That's another way that New Pokémon Snap is adding extra replayability to the Snap 1 formula – it's not just about catching 'em all, but catching 'em all in multiple places and doing lots of different things. Add the fact that over 200 separate species can be seen in this sequel to the fact that you're going for at least four photos of each, and you've got motivation to keep heading back into the wild for more and more runs.

But that's not all! Multiple plays of each stage are even further encouraged thanks to the introduction of a new day/night cycle system as well as the Research Level feature. The day/night system explains itself – you can explore the same environments both while the sun is up and when it's not, which will change which kinds of Pokémon appear. (And Illumina Orbs work best at nighttime, of course.) Research Level, meanwhile, is a rating that goes up as your fill your Photodex – a higher Research Level for an area means more 'mons will appear there, as well as new alternate pathways. Taking all those different variables into account, you should be able to visit each area dozens of times before you've seen all there is to see.



Exploring all of the Lental region, filling the entire Photodex and becoming a true professor impressor are all just the in-game goals of New Pokémon Snap – the full experience of the game plays out in the real world! Our society is a whole lot more social and much more connected today than it was back in 1999, so creating images that will go viral with a human audience is part of the appeal of this package as well.

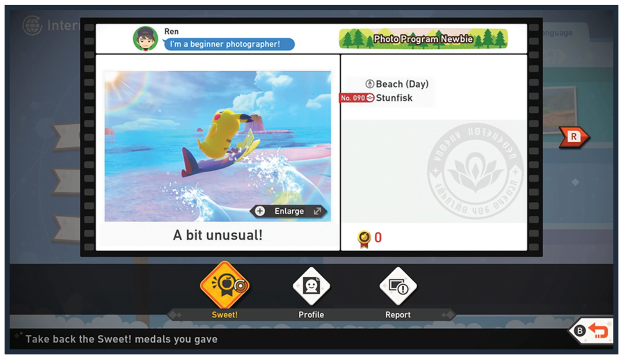
Recognizing the need to support social sharing, the developers of New Snap have introduced the Re-Snap feature. You're no longer limited to living with photos as they were snapped out on the trail! Now, the snapshots you bring back to home base are just a starting point, and a whole suite of editing tools allows you to adjust them to the point of perfection before you share them online. You can tweak the zoom, alter the focal point, change the angle, apply blur and more to make the base image really pop. Then you can go further, adding layers of stickers on top of the photo to enhance its comedic value or aggro intensity, as well as frames to, well, frame the whole scene.

When you're satisfied with your work, it's time to upload it and watch the positive affirmation roll in – in the form of "Sweet!" medals given to you by others. (Make sure you rate other players' work as well!)

The built-in photo sharing and ratings system will likely be what most players stick with to showcase their work to the world, but of course there are still the social features of the Switch on a system level, like making use of the Capture Button to send photos you've made in New Pokémon Snap to the Switch Album, after which they can be shared to social media like Twitter. If you create a true masterpiece, make sure you give as many people a chance to lay eyes on it as possible!

And that, right there, is probably the best example of how far the crossover of video games and photography has come since the release of the first Pokémon Snap. That was an incredible game, but the best photos ever snapped while playing it were probably only shared with a handful of friends and family, and maybe a few strangers who were hanging around near the printing station at Blockbuster. Here in 2021, New Pokémon Snap has the potential to soar in ways that original never could! Here's hoping it truly catches on and becomes the next big hit on Switch, inspiring an all-new generation to not only play this video game for fun, but to also consider taking up real photography too!

. . . And here's also hoping that the next Snap sequel will arrive sometime sooner than 21 years, nine months and four days from now. **– LUCAS**



THE FATE OF FATAL FRAME

FROM RESIDENT EVIL to Luigi's Mansion, horror games are scarier than the movies in one big way: They force you to face your fears. Need to get through an uncomfortable scene in a film? Well, like Tyler the Creator once said, "just close your eyes" and wait for it to end. It's not so easy with games. In order to get to the credits, you have to watch the screen at all times, analyzing it for threats, anticipating all the terrors that could be just around the corner.

The Fatal Frame series takes this hyperfocus on danger and ratchets it up a few notches. Not only do you have to be constantly on guard against potentially invisible assailants, but when they finally attack, you're forced to look them dead in the eye and take their picture! Most of us only take pics of people and places we really want to remember, but in this series, you're forced to take photographs of things that you, and the entire earthly plane, would rather leave buried. Ghosts; gray and aching with a cold pain, reaching out their clammy hands, begging you to join them.

If that sounds more intense than your average "run away then shoot from a safe distance" survival horror game, you're not wrong. Created in 2001 by Makoto Shibata and Keisuke Kikuchi, the Fatal Frame series came after Resident Evil, Silent Hill and other groundbreaking games in the genre. In order to make a name for itself, it needed to go beyond the scares of its forebears, putting players even closer to death, and making them feel even more powerless in the process.

Some of the games' events were taken directly from Shibata's personal experiences with the supernatural, though by and large, the series stars young women (some of whom are secretly just as scary as the phantoms in their midst). The Camera Obscura, the weapon that appears in every game in the franchise, is also frightening in its own right. It contains the power to steal souls and put them on paper — so whatever you do, don't take a selfie with it!

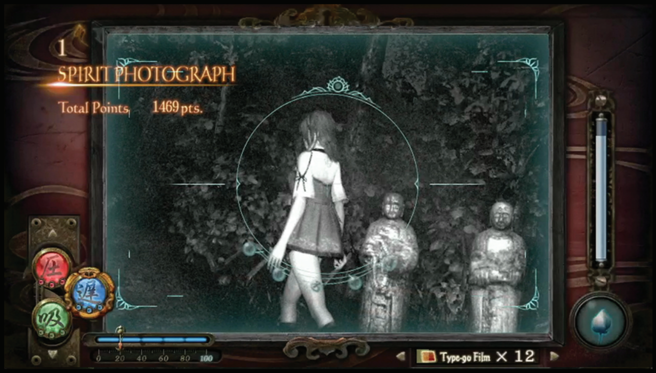
While the series has never been a blockbuster success, it's long been a multi-media cult favorite. It's spawned a series of non-game spin-offs over the years, including a movie, an amusement park attraction, a manga series and even a book!

Unfortunately, the series definitely took a turn for the "obscure" (ha!) when it was partially acquired by Nintendo around 2008. At the time, it seemed like a match made in heaven. Nintendo needed an "adult" franchise to fill the gap left by third-party developers who largely passed on the Wii, and better yet, the acquisition happened just before the start of a mini-trend of like-minded horror games on the console like Ju-On: The Grudge, Cursed Mountain, Calling, Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon and Silent Hill: Shattered Memories. In theory, fanatics for that brand of semi-pacifistic spookfest should have snatched them all up.

Sadly, that wasn't the case, in part because of Nintendo of America's decision to "ghost" the series. They passed on localizing both Fatal Frame IV: Mask of the Lunar Eclipse (the only title in the franchise to never leave Japan) and an excellent Wii remake of Fatal Frame II. To their credit, they did greenlight Spirit Camera, a 3DS spin-off that tapped into that portable's ability to augment reality, but it was critically panned, leading to washed-out sales. While it was a novel concept, it was out of its depth; blurring the line between game and gimmick, failing folks on both sides of the lens.

The fifth Fatal Frame game, Maiden of Black Water, also struggled. While it did at least make it to North America, it did so as an eShop exclusive; making it more of a digital possession than a real-life physical purchase. It also got scorched by critics, in part for its heavy reliance on cheesecake fanservice to lure in players. That's a turn-on for some, but an even bigger turn-off for others, leaving the series to tread water. Despite a canonical crossover with Tecmo's Dead or Alive series, the game tanked, sinking the franchise along with it.

Now, as the series reaches its 20th anniversary here in 2021, does Fatal Frame have a ghost of a chance of coming back from the dead? In a 2020 interview with Nintendo Everything, co-creator Kikuchi said that "Even though I have these hopes, this is a series that Nintendo publishes for us and I only handle the development. So even if I were to say I want to make another game, that doesn't necessarily mean that's what will happen." That said, he didn't want to exorcise all hope, stating that while "it's not exactly realistic at the moment," he's "never really given up on the idea" of a series revival.



SCREENSHOTS FROM **FATAL FRAME: MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER** FOR Wii U

This tease had fans moaning for more, their minds manifesting all the different ways that the Switch could help resurrect the franchise. It just didn't seem fair that Maiden of Black Water could have sent the series into limbo. So many Wii U games sold poorly, and almost just as many have found new life on Nintendo's latest console. Fatal Frame could rise from the ashes too . . . but after the chilly response the last two games received in the States, what would it take to make the third time the charm?

Since the Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted Nintendo's ability to develop new titles, maybe digging up some older code first would be the way to go. Suda51, the featured artist and game developer in our last issue, is one of gaming's biggest names, and he actually co-directed and co-wrote Fatal Frame IV. Releasing it in the States this October with his name slapped on the box would make for a nice treat, especially for fans who have been waiting for it since the Wii days. Pack it in with the Fatal Frame II remake and Maiden of Black Water for good measure and you've got yourself a certified seance of spine-tingling video game fun! Sure, all three titles are a little dusty by today's standards, but to 99% of Switch owners, they'd feel completely brand new. They also introduce a fair amount of new scares that would definitely be a hit with both players and streamers.

For example, they sometimes dare the player to hold down a button for a long time as your leading lady reaches out to pick up an object. A ghost may try to grab you, and the only way to avoid its icy embrace is to lift up your thumb. Retreat too soon, though, and you lose the item forever. These intense games of "chicken with specters," mixed with the Switch's ability to instantly share them online with 30-second videos, give the whole unholy affair serious viral potential. Better yet, all three of these Fatal Frames include Luigi costumes for the leads! Dressing up as Nintendo's favorite cowardly polter-guster in a purely virtual way could become the new Halloween tradition for Switch fans, especially in this time of social distancing.

To top it all off, Nintendo could release this theoretical collection alongside a Fatal Frame rep in the Smash Fighters Pass. When Terry Bogard dunked out on Fatal Fury and waved hello to the world of Smash Bros., some said "Who?", others screamed "Yes!", but everyone paid attention. It's easy to imagine Minu Hinusake from Maiden of Black Water, the daughter of the first Fatal Frame's Miku Hinusake and a bonafide half-ghost herself, making a similar splash. Using a camera for combat would also be a first, even for Ultimate – which, due to its cast's sheer size, is gradually running out of ways to surprise us.

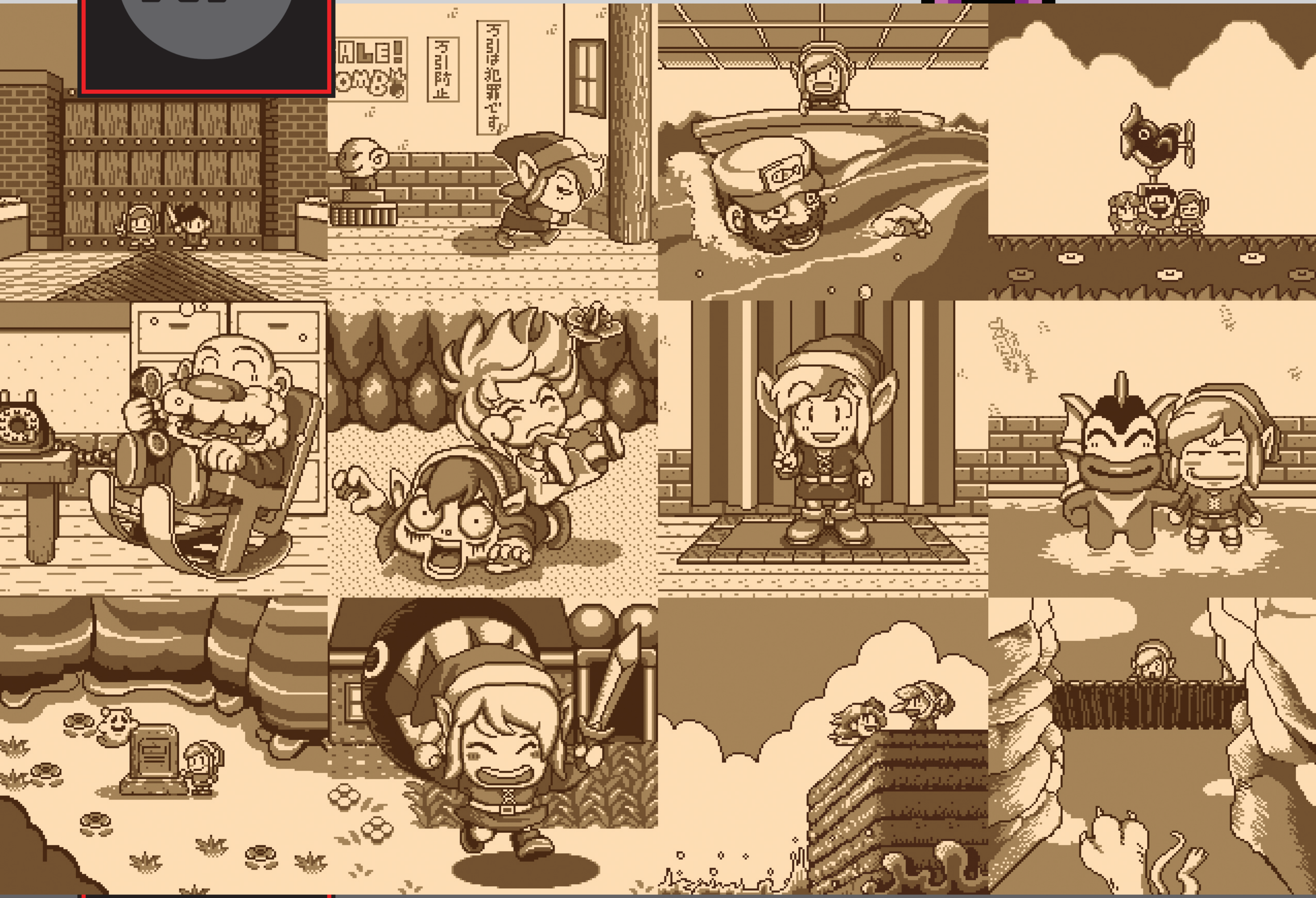
If all that worked out, then a full-fledged Fatal Frame VI for Switch would be the logical next move. Nintendo has made a lot of missteps with the series, but if there's one thing they do know how to do, it's to learn from their mistakes. The massive success of the Switch, born out of the corpse of Wii U, is just one example. That said, maybe the mistake would be to make a straight sequel at all? It could be that a Fatal Frame mobile app, that takes the augmented reality concept of the 3DS game and puts some meat on its bones, might be the smarter way to go. Who wouldn't want to take their phones out for a midnight stroll to hunt some haunters?

If we want to rein in our hopes, though, a straight Wii U-to-Switch conversion of just Maiden of Black Water alone would be more than welcome. Nintendo doesn't have many first-party Wii U titles still waiting to be ported, and it's just sitting there. Available.

Regardless of what form it takes next, if Nintendo wants to grow the franchise, they should bring Fatal Frame back down to the T-rated level. Recent years have shown that there's a huge market for teen-friendly horror movies and games that are more jumpy but less gory. Scared-face reaction videos are still wildly popular, and by and large, the games that make streamers scream often succeed as a result. Fatal Frame leans away from blood and guts as it is, but it's not exactly a series that, as Smash Bros. creator Masahiro Sakurai might say, is made for "good boys and girls." A truly inviting, yet still frightening, new style of Fatal Frame could be a massive hit for Nintendo. But will they read the room and get the picture? Let's hope we find out this year.

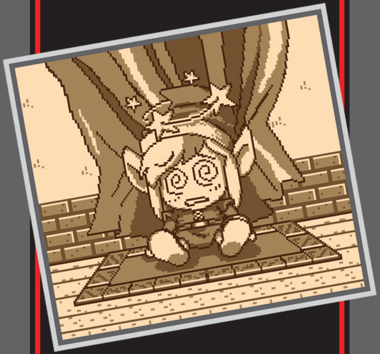
– JONATHAN

BY THOR THORVALDSON

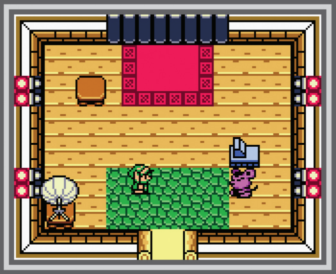


FILLING UP LINK'S PHOTO ALBUM

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING DX
GAME BOY COLOR, 1998



The recent Switch remake of Link's Awakening was great, no doubt, but it did unfortunately cut out one fan-favorite character from the previous re-release: the Photographer! This enterprising shutterbug of a mouse set up a Camera Shop on Koholint Island exclusively on the Game Boy Color, and after Link encountered him for the first time, he then popped up in several other places throughout the remainder of the adventure, always ready to snap a shot and preserve a moment of heroism (or failure) on film. The full album is presented for your perusal above – and it may be the first time that even players who completed Link's Awakening DX have seen the entire set. That's because many of the shots were easy to miss! For example, there's a short sequence in the middle of Link's quest when he's followed around by Marin. You have to take her to three precise spots on the island within that window of time, otherwise you'll miss these Kodak moments! — **LUCAS**



PERIPHERAL VISION
GAME BOY CAMERA

Remembering Nintendo's pioneering digital photography device!

THE FIRST CAMERA phone was released in 1999, and it wouldn't be until 2002 that a trend in phones having cameras was really established, but even then most of those devices were on the more expensive end of the spectrum.

The Game Boy Camera predated all of that, hitting store shelves worldwide in 1998. Cheap, small and unlike anything else out at the time, the peripheral soon caught the eye of many consumers. After all, this was still the era where taking a picture meant snapping it, sending it in to get developed and retrieving it later. You didn't know if the shot you took was any good for days! This was instant, and you could even embellish the photographs with stamps or doodles. Mirroring, scaling, collage and even panorama shots were also possible, so it was amazing having a photo manipulation suite built into the camera. You could even create animations using stop motion or set a timer to take a photo! When you think about it, because the camera eye swiveled to be facing the user or not, some of the very first selfies were taken with these devices.

All Game Boys could use the Game Boy Camera but the Micro, but some worked better than others. The placement of the cartridge slot on the Game Boy Advance SP meant the camera was upside down.

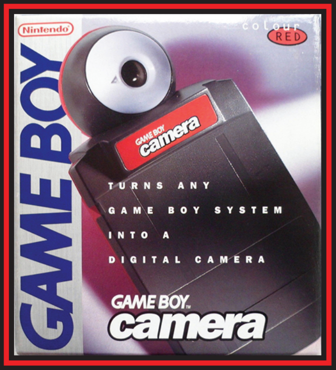
The cart also had built-in minigames. Space Fever II was the main event, and it was the sequel to Nintendo's 1979 Space Fever arcade game. It's a simple shmup that has your ship firing on other ships until a boss battle is reached. Shooting the "B" ship at the start leads to the game Ball. If you've played the Game & Watch version of Ball, then you know what Ball was like on Game Boy Camera: Move the hands to keep the ball up in the air. The "D" ship led to DJ, where you could actually create music using a basic sequencer. After clearing 2000 points in Space Fever, Run! Run! Run! appeared. In this game, players raced against an underground mole or an airborne bird and attempted to best them in a race. In all of the games, some element of the graphics was always replaced by a portion of a photo that players selected as the "Game Face."

All of this sounds great – until you see an actual image. The device stored photos at a size of only 128x112 pixels, and only in a four-color palette. And it could store only 30 photos at a time, so if you wanted to take any more it meant erasing old ones. Users could take their photos into a Super Game Boy and change the color scheme, but there was no way to extract the photo at the time unless you had more sophisticated and expensive electronics to capture a screen image.

The device went deeper in Japan, where you could dump stored photos to a 64DD floppy disc and use them in the Mario Artist suite of games/software and others. Nintendo's option for most was to create the Game Boy Printer. (More on that on the next page.)

All of this was contingent on if the user was actually able to get a usable shot. The Game Boy screen was hard to see in sunlight, and it wasn't until the Game Boy Advance SP came out that Game Boys had a backlit display. Compound this with the fact the camera needed good lighting to get an image worth seeing, and you had frustrating technical drawbacks.

Still, the device was fascinating. (Neil Young famously used a Game Boy Camera image his daughter took as the cover art for his album Silver & Gold!) Today these technical drawbacks are seen as a challenge for artists wanting to use the hardware to get that grainy old retro feel. There are devices that allow the camera to have expanded storage and far more options for transferring the images to other formats. The Game Boy Camera endures, and now lenses and other devices can expand its limited potential. **– BRETT**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: JUNE 1, 1998
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & JUPITER

PLAYING IT TODAY

The Game Boy Camera has never been re-released in any form. Though later Nintendo handhelds like the DSi and 3DS featured built-in cameras that technically could have worked with an eShop version of the software itself, most users probably wouldn't have appreciated the kitschy resolution and color restrictions. Besides, anyone with a sincere interest in throwback photography would accept nothing less than original hardware! As long as you own a working Game Boy, returning to the shutterbug game won't put a huge dent in your wallet – judging by recent sold listings on eBay, complete-in-box Cameras will only set you back around $50, while loose units are around $20!

COLOR CHOICES

The Game Boy Camera was sold in a variety of colors: Blue, green, red and yellow were standard, while a clear purple version was released in Japan. But the gold version seen here was reserved for people who used a mail-order offer only found in Nintendo Power! Only 2,000 were made to promote the release of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. This version had exclusive Zelda-themed stamps: Navi and Link's eyes and ears could be placed on photos to instantly transform anyone into a Hylian. Busts of Young Link, Adult Link, Young Zelda, Ganondorf and a Hylian Shield could all be added as well. This version also had three preloaded photos featuring Link & Epona, Young Link & Young Zelda and Adult Link wielding the Master Sword. Golden!

ORIGINAL RELEASE: JUNE 1, 1998
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & JUPITER

PLAYING IT TODAY

There's clearly still a niche for the Game Boy Camera in the modern age, but what subsection of that group would give the Game Boy Printer a casual glance? Unless you're really into collaging or slapping photo stickers on your backpack and notepad, rare is the need for physical prints in our social media-driven society. Assuming you are part of that subsection, expect to pay roughly double the price of a loose Camera for a loose Printer on eBay – somewhere in the $40-$50 range, not including the cable required to link the two devices. Then you have to stock up on thermal paper that rings up at $10-$15 per roll and fades in a matter of literal months – obviously, the paper is proprietary and no longer in production. When all's said and done, you'll be down $100+ for a device with limited use, plus a resource in even more limited supply. So unless you're a hardcore hardware collector, your best bet for photo preservation is to use a third-party solution to transfer files directly from the Camera to your computer. And if you are a hardcore hardware collector? Well, enjoy getting into a hobby few others share any more!

PERIPHERAL VISION GAME BOY PRINTER

The Camera's companion, preserving your pictures in physical form!

AS FAR AS retro tech goes, the Game Boy Camera was a fascinating device. Its companion piece, the Game Boy Printer, was a bit more odd. At the time, it made perfect sense – giving kids the ability to print their creations on their own was undeniably cool – but in hindsight, the whole unit is sort of absurd.

It's pretty bulky – like the original Game Boy – and its coloration matches right down to the grey body and not-quite-red "feed" button. It's heavy too, especially once it's loaded with thermal paper and a whopping six AA batteries. And the printing process is distressingly loud! Actually using it is fortunately less frustrating than even modern printers. The paper loads easily, and connecting it to your Game Boy is as simple as plugging in a cable.

Since this wasn't a color printer, Nintendo released different colored rolls of paper, all of which doubled as stickers. It also worked with an astonishing number of games, ranging from big name Nintendo properties like Super Mario Bros. Deluxe and Pokémon Gold & Silver to third-party offerings like NFL Blitz and Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2. No less than 36 titles included Game Boy Printer support!

For example, in the GBC release of Donkey Kong Country you could print out stickers of various promotional art and all 26 letters of the English alphabet, complete with unique DK characters on each one. In Link's Awakening DX, you could print any of the photos seen back on Page 55. And in Perfect Dark, you could access character and vehicle portraits to print out and stick wherever you wanted!

The Game Boy Printer was a strange peripheral to be sure, but in an age before pocket-sized computers and smartwatches, a functional miniature printer you could fit in your backpack was a truly novel invention. **– KRIS**

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE AVERAGE IMAGE QUALITY

At a resolution of 128x112 pixels and limited to four colors, the Game Boy Camera's specs sound far from impressive. But one glance at those three handsome devils below and you'll be singing a different tune! There's something so appealing about those pixelated snapshots that encourages you to want to see more of the world through the same monochrome lens. The good news is that you can get a taste of 2-bit nirvana without shelling out the cash for a Camera unit! Those samples below? They were converted from pre-existing photos using the open-source image editor GIMP and by following a simple tutorial from the website Game Boy Maniac. You can also explore a variety of free apps, most notably a web-based solution designed by Maple "Mavica" Syrup called Webgbcam, which allows users to adjust contrast and brightness as well as record five-second animated GIFs. Though these modern solutions will be enough to satisfy most users' avatar creation needs, a handful will no doubt feel inspired to invest in a proper Game Boy Camera of their very own!

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

WHILE THE NP crew seemed to have been caught flat-footed by the delay of the Nintendo 64 early on in 1996 and the lack of new 64-bit Fun Machine releases to cover, they managed to soldier on through the May issue with aplomb.

Headlining the issue was Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run, a baseball title from Rare and Nintendo for the Super NES that served as the follow-up to Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball. And while Nintendo 64 games weren't hitting shelves just yet, an increase in preview material helped fill the pages with features such as a behind-the-scenes look at Mission: Impossible, a licensed tie-in to the first Tom Cruise movie in the franchise from N64 Dream Team member Ocean Software. Plus, titles that might not have gotten a spotlight in the wake of Super Mario 64, Pilotwings 64, etc. – looking at you, Mohawk & Headphone Jack; and don't think you were a lock, either, Lobo – had an opportunity to shine.

The 1995 Nintendo Power Award winners were also declared, with Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest, Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island and Chrono Trigger killing it for the Super NES. Game Boy pickings were slim, however, with Donkey Kong Land topping the best Game Boy games, whose runners-up were Kirby's Dream Land 2 and . . . Defender/Joust. Much love to the Midway classics, but come *on.*

Oh, and if you needed a reminder that the Virtual Boy exists, Wario Land took that top spot, beating out Mario's Tennis and Red Alarm.

You may laugh at the idea now, but online was also a focus in this issue with not one, but *two* features dedicated to their America Online website/community, Nintendo Power Source. One looked over an interactive Metroid story told through the site called "Blood of the Chozo," while the other profiled the three hosts of "The Loud House," who were described as "cyberjocks" among the denizens of the "electronic lounge."

Pak Watch closed things out with a ton of screens of Super Mario 64, a good handful for Pilotwings 64 and, for good measure, some Turok: Dinosaur Hunter as well.

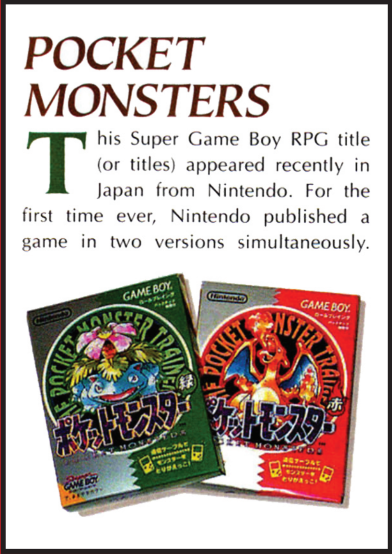
Come June, however, the floodgates opened. A whopping 31 pages of Nintendo 64 coverage shone brightly with Super Mario 64, Pilotwings 64, Blast Corps, Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire, Cruis'n USA, GoldenEye 007, DOOM 64, Body Harvest, Wave Race 64, looks at Dream Team members Rare and Williams Entertainment and a peek at still further releases, from Mario Kart 64 (then "Super Mario Kart R") and Wayne Gretsky's 3D Hockey to the ill-fated Kirby's Air Ride and Robotech Crystal Dreams. It was like Christmas in July, but in June!

Still, N64 coverage can only do so much, and so Mohawk & Headphone Jack returned to do a little more of the heavy lifting, alongside a Game Boy version of Toy Story and more Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run, which also featured in this month's Player's Poll contest.

While things looked dire in the span between the Super NES' peak and the Nintendo 64's prolonged debut, Pak Watch reminded us there was still some life left in Nintendo's other platforms. Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie's Double Trouble headlined this edition, and Kirby Super Star would prove to be a beloved title for generations to come. Donkey Kong Land 2 would also show that with some refinement, Rare's ACM graphics didn't look too bad on the simple black-and-white Game Boy. **— DAVID**

ISSUE #84: **MAY 1996**

ISSUE #85: **JUNE 1996**

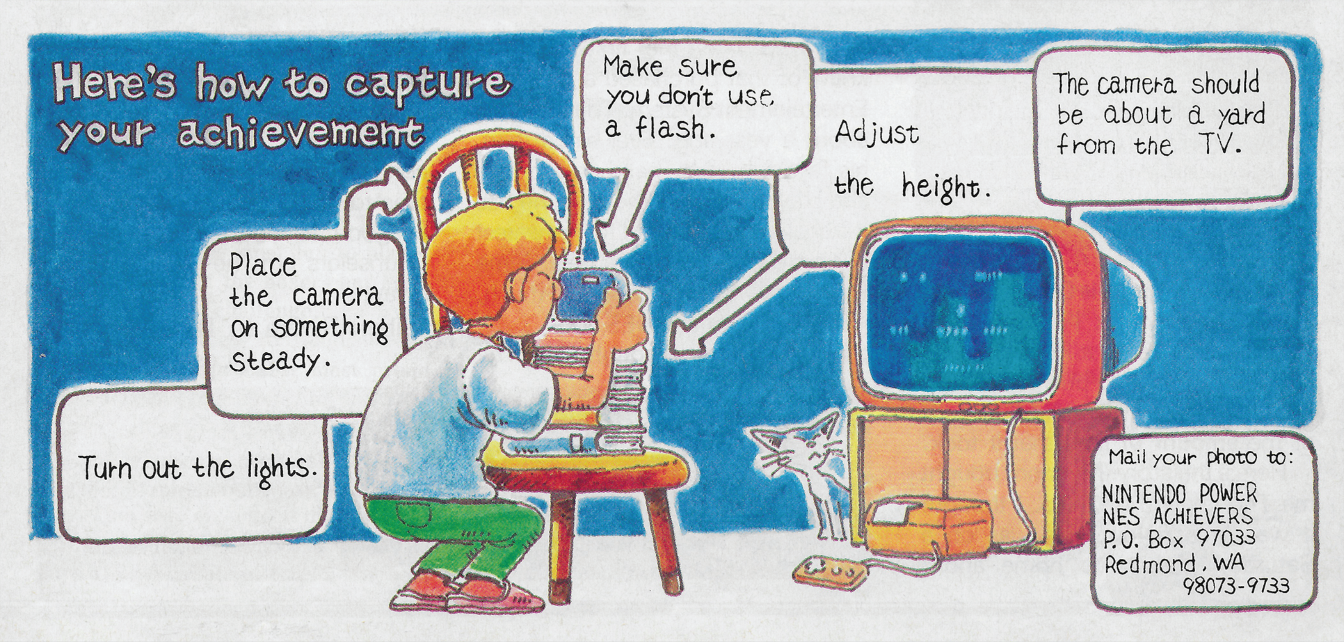


POCKET MONSTERS

This Super Game Boy RPG title (or titles) appeared recently in Japan from Nintendo. For the first time ever, Nintendo published a game in two versions simultaneously.

POKÉMON'S FIRST NP APPEARANCE

As you might have heard, this year marks the 25th anniversary of Pokémon – but all the way back in 1996, no one had any idea just how big this world-wide phenomenon would become. Tucked away in the Epic Center of May's Issue #84 was our first Nintendo Power glimpse at the series, with the box art for Pokémon Red & Pokémon Green (the latter of which reportedly being the better seller in Japan at the time). A lone screenshot depicted a battle between Squirtle and Bulbasaur. When the series came West, its popularity would explode, to the point that Nintendo Power would even wind up creating a sub-magazine for it: Pokémon Power!



THE ART OF THE SCREEN SHOT

Nintendo Power's game coverage was only possible with patient, precise photography.

IN THIS ISSUE, we've had some real fun talking about photography in gaming. But something we haven't focused on as much is photography *of* gaming. And boy, we have come a *long* way there, let me tell you.

Throughout the earlier days of print magazines, screenshots were an entirely different ballgame from where we are now. They were literally shots of a television screen, requiring meticulous attention to various factors, from proper lighting (screen glare being the bane of many a photographer, sometimes necessitating dedicated darkened rooms) to shooting from the proper angle. Even then, CRT televisions saw to it that despite seemingly doing everything correctly, your carefully crafted photograph could wind up as little more than a picture of a blob of lights – and you might not know for weeks, months or however long it took for whoever owned the camera to finish with the roll of film and get it developed!

On the now-defunct USgamer website, industry veteran Jaz Rignall recalled further challenges, including games whose pause menus were obtrusive, thus requiring things to remain in motion while trying to line up that perfect shot. He also recalled going to the Consumer Electronics Show and having to set up an impromptu darkroom, which sometimes briefly alarmed PR people there. "And before you ask, almost no publishers took their own screenshots at the time," he noted, adding, "it was just too difficult, and the expectation was that magazines would always take their own."

If you've ever looked at an old map of, say, Super Mario Bros. 2 in a game magazine and wondered why both Luigi and the Princess were there in the same level? The pasting-together of these photographs would be why.

In the earlier days of Nintendo Power, the editors even had to train Power Players in the art of capturing the perfect screenshot. This way, they could easily verify the highest scores across various games and run the best scores in NES Achievers. After all, could they really count it if they couldn't read it? And there were no leaderboards back then, either! Check out the illustration above to see how it was done.

The practice of using photography to capture screenshots would go on for quite some time. As you can see below in shots from NP #84, even with the reveal of the Nintendo 64 and its flagship title, actual television monitors were photographed by the press on hand at trade shows such as Shoshinkai, giving the resulting images an altogether distinct appearance from the pixel-perfect screens that would later come to be after the turn of the century.

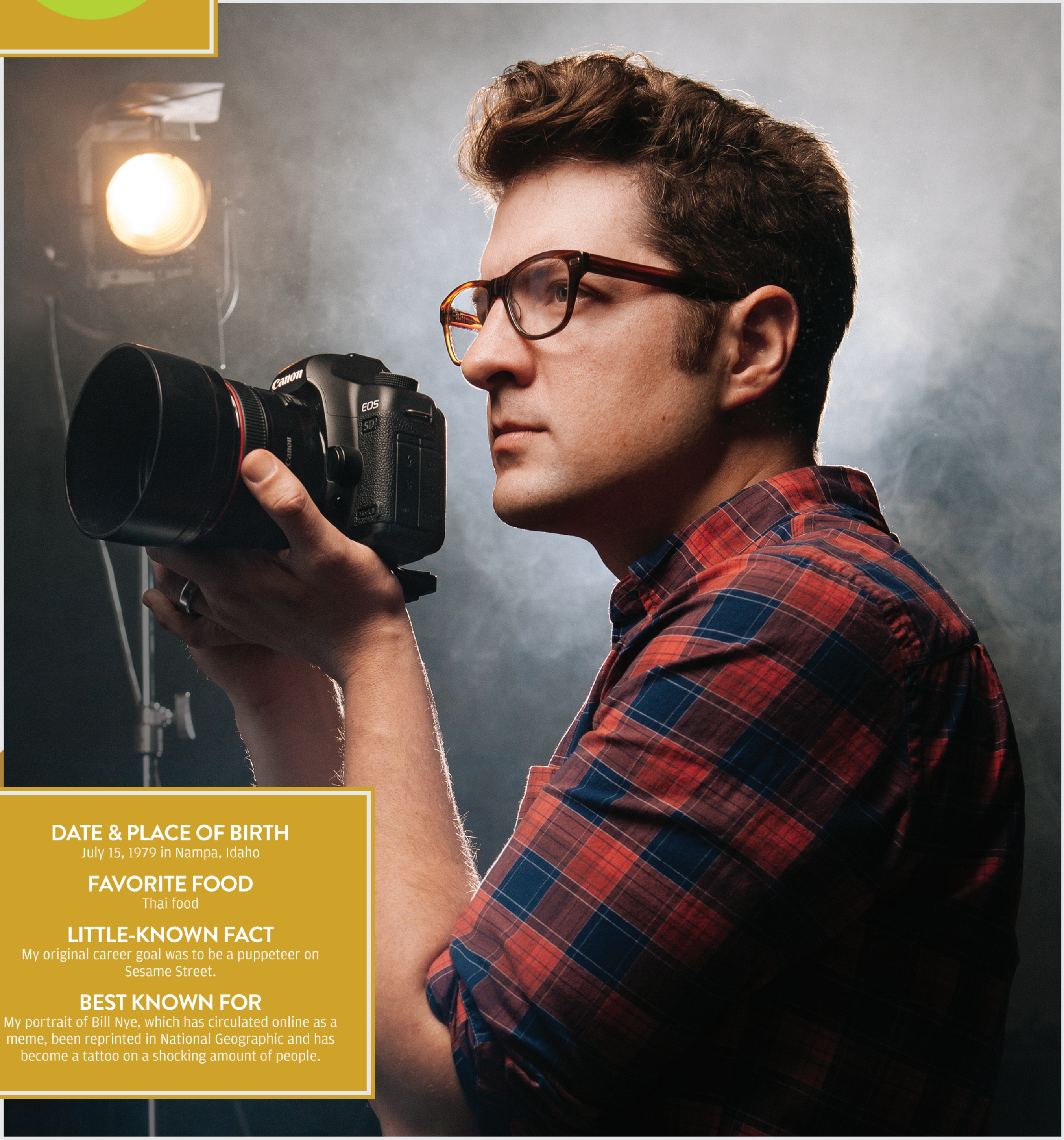
Things have gotten easier over the years, however. For one thing, companies have become much more willing to take their own screens and distribute them, making things easier for many publications. With the rise of computers and the Internet, new ways to play have made capturing a screenshot often as easy as pressing the "Print Screen" button, or using a capture card to get images and footage.

More recently, platform holders and developers have become more open to the idea of allowing users down to the consumer level to make and share their own screenshots. And why not? It's free publicity!

How far we've come, indeed. **– DAVID**

BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

INTERVIEW



DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
July 15, 1979 in Nampa, Idaho

FAVORITE FOOD
Thai food

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT
My original career goal was to be a puppeteer on Sesame Street.

BEST KNOWN FOR
My portrait of Bill Nye, which has circulated online as a meme, been reprinted in National Geographic and has become a tattoo on a shocking amount of people.

BRANDON HILL

Video games let anyone play with virtual cameras – but what's it like to be a real, professional photographer?

INTERVIEW BY **LUCAS M. THOMAS**   PHOTO OF BRANDON (ABOVE) BY **CHRIS RAZ**

PORTRAIT WORK

How does one capture the true essence of a Science Guy? With a photo like this, it seems! The world-renowned Bill Nye appears here in one of Brandon's most popular portraits. His bow ties rival Howard Phillips'!

NF: When did you first become interested in photography?
BRANDON: I think around 2006, right when digital photography became more mainstream and accessible. I think we've had two digital photo booms where the public got a taste of the power of still photography: when the Canon Rebel became digital (and affordable), and then when Instagram came into our lives.

What was the path you took to become a professional photographer? My sons each have cheap little point-and-shoot digital toy cameras, and I think most kids and teenagers dabble in photography at least briefly as a hobby while growing up. But what steps should someone take if they want to develop their skills and grow beyond quickly snapping shots and throwing pre-set filters over them?
I've realized that every professional photographer's path seems to be uniquely their own. I didn't grow up with a camera in the home, but I was always obsessed with drawing and entertaining through art and music. I constantly drew caricatures and cartoons growing up and didn't know what shutter speed was until I was an adult out of school. I went to school for design and digital art and it wasn't until later that I learned how to use a camera. For me I'm kind of grateful for that because I had the foundations of composition before learning the technical aspects.

Decades ago, photography was much less accessible – especially high-end photography, which involved purchasing expensive camera equipment and dealing with the slow process of developing film. Nowadays millions of people carry much more powerful cameras around with them everywhere, embedded in their smartphones. Film has become an artifact of the past, too, replaced by the immediacy of instantly being able to see and review each image as you shoot it. What's your take on how severely photography has changed in the span of a single generation? What does that fast pace of development mean for the future?
This digital revolution has made the photography process vastly more accessible and cheaper. The upside is that more people can learn and create; the downside is that companies pay less than they used to and people repeat trends a lot that they see on social media. A big shift happened when digital cameras became affordable, and then another when our phones could take decent images and social media became prevalent. So it's a double-edged sword for the industry: It's easier to create for an audience, but vastly more competitive.

As far as my photography process, I personally try to think like an illustrator more than a photojournalist, meaning often I'll try to imagine the image before photographing it. Then the journey to creating it is really fulfilling. This works for my personal work – not as much with fast-moving lifestyle campaigns where it's more about capturing the moment with models.

In this issue we're celebrating the impending release of New Pokémon Snap, a long-requested sequel to the fan-favorite original Pokémon Snap that first let players go on virtual photo safaris and take pictures of Pokémon characters in the wild. Did you play Pokémon Snap when it first came out two decades ago? If so, what were your impressions of it back then?
Sadly I didn't play the original until later. For some reason, when the N64 was out I viewed it as such a luxury item, despite having an original NES, SNES, Genesis, Game Boy and Game Gear. I don't know why! Maybe because it was going for around $250 at launch, and game systems had not been priced like that before then. So it took me longer to catch up.

I would have loved Pokémon Snap and maybe it would have gotten me into photography earlier. I'm really excited to play the new Pokémon Snap on the Switch with my kids, and even print their images from it like the old Blockbuster Video Pokémon Snap Station! I'm so glad they've listened to the fans and are bringing it back for the modern gaming era. I can personally right the wrong of not playing it enough earlier in life.

How about taking in the grander scope of the crossover between video games and photography? Which games have represented photography well? Which ones haven't done such a great job?
When I was younger it seems like there would be those underwater discovery games with a camera, but that never grabbed me.

Fortunately I think we're in a renaissance of photo modes in video games and I hope that it stays forever. My Switch Album is filled with still images from Super Mario 3D World. And then giving us the ability to control lighting and filters, depth of field . . . it's really incredible.

I also spent a long time with the photo mode in The Last of Us Part II. Maybe eventually we'll be able to create our own short films with in-game photo and video modes.

What have been some of your most rewarding and personally fulfilling projects?
Some of the most fulfilling work I've done is my personal series and portrait photography.

I initially began as a photographer of models only, but then I realized how unique the experience is to photograph someone because of who they are or what they've accomplished. It makes each session more memorable. I've been privileged to photograph people like Bill Gates, Will Ferrell, Bill Nye and some others.

I have a personal concept series that is "kid versions" of Saturday Night Live characters. I wanted to make that series simply because I thought it would make me laugh, and that it didn't exist. And it got a lot more response than any work I've been paid to do.

I tell that to students or interns whenever I can: Photograph a series that hasn't existed before – something that is unique to your own weirdness. Even if no one responds, you made something for yourself that is about who you are.

In addition to being a photographer, you're also a Dad! Your sons have even been involved in your work from time to time – and you clearly wanted that collaboration to happen early on, since your Madd Stunts series starred your son Maddex while he was still a baby! Now that they're a little older, do they have more desire to be in front of the camera, or behind it?
Hah, yes being a Dad of crazy, goofy sons makes life really fun (and at times tiring). It's actually hard to photograph them because of their sheer willpower. If I have something specific in mind I need to sweeten the deal, pay with candy, that kind of thing. I need to create a new series with them, or collaborate with their ideas and let them be my art directors for my next series. Hey, I just thought of that! I think I'll do that for my next project.

What's next for Brandon Hill? What personal or professional goals lie ahead?
Previously I've created two portrait series on immigration and refugees, and those were very humbling and rewarding. My next portrait series goal was to photograph the elderly in nursing homes and showcasing their expressions and legacies – but then 2020 happened. It's still a goal.

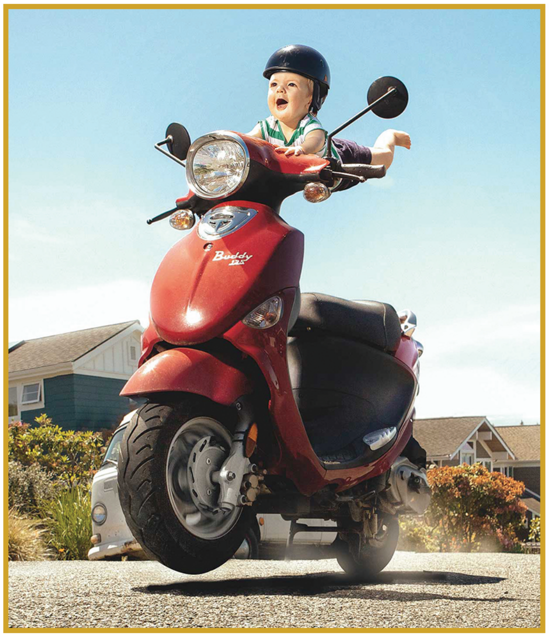
As far as commercial work, I've really loved lifestyle commercial campaigns that involve kids, families, technology and toys. It's just fun to be on set and see kids actually engage with a board game or device, and it's more real than other corporate work.

Finally, if you could have any super power, what would it be, and why?
I think I'd like a real-life Photo Mode. The ability to freeze life, photograph something in 360 degrees, change lighting, colors, depth of field . . .

Whoa. That's probably too much power for one person. But it would be cool, huh?

LIVING SILVERSTEIN

The work of Shel Silverstein is a favorite in the Thomas home. If you're unfamiliar with him, he was an author, cartoonist and all-around renaissance man of silliness who published prolificly up until he passed away in 1999 — and then several more works emerged afterward, brought to the public posthumously, like the famous Runny Babbit. Apparently the Hill household is similarly acquainted with Shel, as one of Brandon's photography projects has been to re-create the tiny illustrations drawn next to his poems as real-life images. Here's "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" with an extra helping of glee!



MADD STUNTS

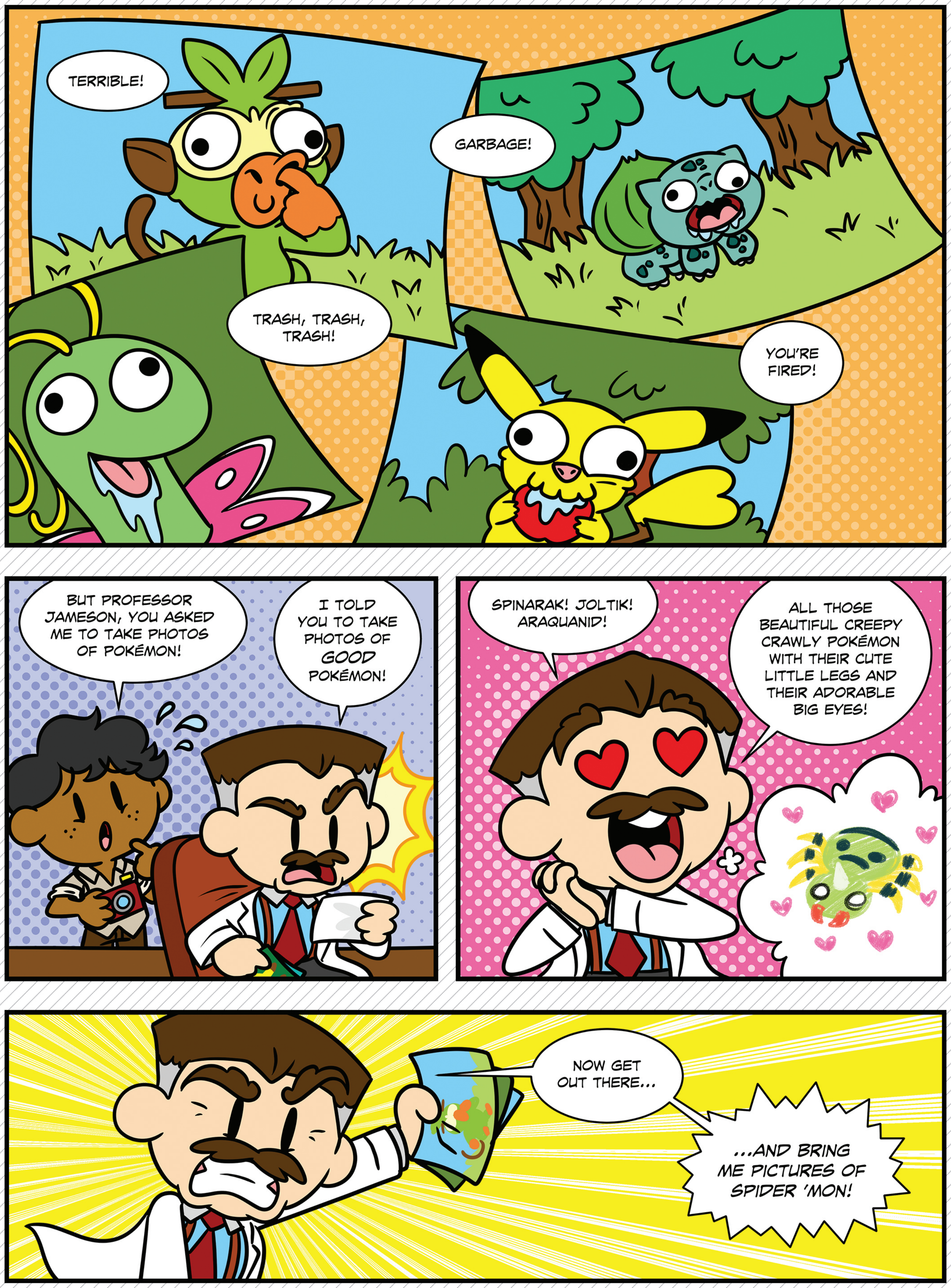
Becoming a parent for the first time is the most intimidating transition human life has to offer, because all of a sudden another human's life is yours to keep safe! Brandon kicked all semblance of safety to the curb when his first son Maddex came along, though, spending part of his earliest years placing him into the most dangerous situations possible in order to snap some great Instagram-worthy shots . . . Just kidding! Photoshop magic is what made Maddex appear to be in harm's way in images like the scooter ride seen above, but the little guy was always perfectly defended from danger by his brand-new Dad.

SNL JR.

Are you a fan of Saturday Night Live? NBC's seminal sketch comedy show has been airing new live broadcasts on Saturday nights ever since the '70s, with a rotating cast of comedians who've frequently gone on to become Hollywood stars when their time in Studio 8H has come to an end. The show itself has varied in quality over the decades, to be sure, but it's also produced several iconic characters across its 46 seasons as well. Another of Brandon's photography projects reached back into the past of SNL and recast some of its most famous faces with kids instead! Pictured here is a boy who needs more cowbell!!!

PRODUCT PROMOTION

Finally, most readers of this magazine will be most familiar with Brandon's work as a photographer-for-hire who's paid to present various companies' products in eye-catching advertisements and promotional images. He's captured true moments of joy with players enjoying a variety of video games. He's gotten down to the surface of the tabletop to make board games look incredibly epic. And, seen here, a great shot for the Purina brand! For more of Brandon's work in all these categories and more, please visit **BrandonHillPhotos.com** and his Instagram at **Instagram.com/BrandonHill**. We can only print a few!



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

Two years after joining the cast of Smash, Joker's finally brought his series (and all his friends) to a Nintendo home console. Get to know him and all the Phantom Thieves better than ever in Persona 5 Strikers!

The Phantom Thieves Strike Back

PERSONA 5 STRIKERS

WHILE PERSONA 5 STRIKERS released in February, I think it's great timing that our review is featured in our May/June issue.

Let me explain.

This spin-off and sequel to 2017's Persona 5, from Atlus and Omega Force, resembles a summer vacation in many ways. For one, its story takes place during summer break for protagonist Joker and the Phantom Thieves.

More importantly, when you compare Strikers to Persona 5, which is a deep and robust JRPG, Strikers has a more lighthearted tone, more streamlined mechanics and a shorter (but heartwarming) story packed inside.

Kind of like how summer feels compared to the rest of the year, I think!

There's a lot of fun to be had with Strikers, and the core of it lies with how well Atlus and Omega Force were able to combine the compelling story, cast and turn-based combat from Persona 5 with the fast-paced action of the Musou (or "Warriors") series of games.

Strikers opens up with Joker returning to Tokyo to reunite with his friends a few months after the events of Persona 5. (I do recommend playing Persona 5 before diving into Strikers, because its story and events are referenced often. It's available on both PlayStation 3 and 4.)

The group plans to have a fun summer break – but those plans go awry when they discover new threats in the cognitive world known as the Metaverse. This sends Joker and the Phantom Thieves to different cities across Japan in a tricked-out RV they dub the Phantomobile.

I loved this aspect of Strikers' premise. As Joker, you get to explore new locales and experience their culture and attractions with the Phantom Thieves. Many of my favorite moments included scenes where the group bonded together by going to the beach or watching fireworks on their trip, and that's also thanks to the excellent writing and voice acting used to bring these characters to life.

The two main additions to the cast, Sophia (an adorable A.I. tasked with learning about the human heart) and witty police inspector Zenkichi Hasegawa, also stand out with their own personal struggles and perspectives.

Unlike Persona 5, Strikers doesn't feature individual bonding events with each character. Instead, you get to see the group grow closer collectively, with a single bond level that goes up as they all spend time together.

This leads to some hilarious and heartwarming moments, and as your bond level increases you get points to spend on perks to use in the Metaverse.

Persona 5 Strikers features new Metaverse locales called Jails, rather than the Palaces from the first game. Jails include warped versions of entire cities. As the Phantom Thieves, you can climb up buildings, run across roofs and swing from ziplines as you explore. All of the Jails have their own distinct environments. One includes a twisted carnival theme, and another features a city that's frozen over.

Exploring Jails takes time, but doing so never felt stale or repetitive because they all had different styles, layouts and intel to discover.

The Jails also, of course, have plenty of enemies to face, and Strikers gives you a big arsenal to deal with them. The game's combat lets you control a group of four Phantom Thieves (Joker, plus three others) and has both action and turn-based elements you can use. You'll want to employ a combination of both to succeed against the toughest enemies.

On the action side, you can hack and slash through mobs of enemies consisting of generic security officers and Personas from the series like Jack Frost and Pixie. Each Phantom Thief

also has special moves you can activate through button combos. The Jails' differing environments play a role in combat, too. You can use things such as streetlights and cars to employ specialized attacks.

The turn-based features resemble those found in Persona 5's combat system. The Phantom Thieves have elemental and physical attacks, healing magic and buffs tied to their Personas, and you can pause time to deploy them. It's especially satisfying when you hit an enemy's weakness and activate an All-Out Attack, where the four characters team up to deal massive damage.

The marriage between these turn- and action-based combat styles couldn't be better. It made me want to engage enemies instead of sneak by them. (That probably makes me a bad Phantom Thief, but hey, it was fun.)

The Jails feature enemies of all strengths, from mobs with hundreds of weak foes to the powerful Monarchs, who rule the Jails and change the hearts of the masses to increase their own popularity in the real world.

Beyond providing challenging battles, I found the Monarchs to be more satisfying villains than the Palace Rulers in Persona 5. Strikers takes more time to show you how these people got to the distorted emotional place you find them in.

The Monarchs all have struggles that led them to take advantage of society, and while it doesn't excuse their behavior, I found myself understanding their perspectives, and it makes it even more meaningful when you work to change their hearts.

Persona 5 Strikers' low point is its sidequests, which are uninspired. They require you to revisit Jails you've previously explored to fight Personas, take on the Jail's Monarch again, and traverse the entire Jail from start to finish without raising its security level.

Basically, they're objectives you already had to do when you infiltrated each Jail the first time. What makes it worse is that new weapons and armor are sometimes locked behind these quests, so skipping them can have consequences.

Sidequests aside, Persona 5 Strikers proves to be a beautiful and worthy sequel to the original game, with the cast, story and combat all shining in old and new ways. It's a journey worth going on, whether you take it this summer or in any season to come. **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATLUS DEVELOPERS: OMEGA FORCE & P-STUDIO RATING: M

SECOND OPINION
ACTION AND INACTION

I MADE A crucial mistake when starting Persona 5 Strikers.

This game was made by Omega Force, the same developers behind Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity. I expected that Strikers would be another similar game; a Dynasty Warriors-style battlefield simulator wearing the Persona skin.

I was very wrong. Persona 5 Strikers is the perfect evolution of the first Persona 5: a full-fledged sequel that delivers more of the same, engaging RPG sense of adventure. While Persona 5 still isn't available on the Switch, Strikers is a wonderful consolation prize.

Persona games have rightly earned their reputation as among the most engaging and enjoyable of the Japanese RPGs. They're split into two halves: dungeon crawling is effectively Pokémon, as you collect and battle monsters in turn-based battles; while the rest of your time is spent hanging out with your teenage pals, getting up to juvenile hijinks.

As such, Persona games are rich in story and heavy on text. This is true of Strikers as well, as the action often takes a back seat to lengthy exposition and character development. It's not uncommon to go an hour without attacking anything, as the game's characters slowly make their way across Japan.

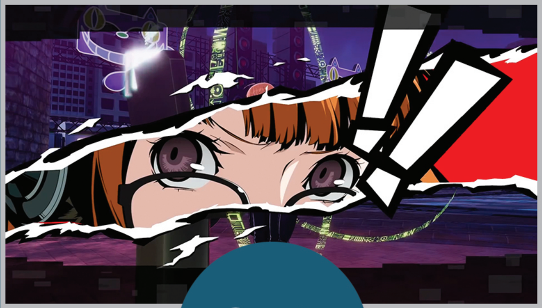
I wouldn't have thought that this would be a good fit for an action game, but it seems I underestimated the talented writers at Atlus. I've found it delightful to simply chat with my group of buddies, wander around shops and watch the plot slowly – *very* slowly – unfold. When the presentation is this gorgeous, the endless exposition isn't an annoyance, but rather, it's the main attraction. A selling point, rather than a flaw.

When the game feels like it's finally time for the action to begin, again, things feel distinctly Persona-esque rather than following the established Dynasty Warriors formula. Yes, you hack and slash your way through multiple enemies, but you also pause the game periodically to select a special move from a menu, paying careful attention to which moves are effective against which enemies. This isn't so much an action game with RPG elements as it is an RPG that lets you swing your knife in real time.

All of this works surprisingly well. The result is a game which, if I'm being completely honest, feels far meatier – and far less repetitive – than Age of Calamity. The writing, presentation and disparate gameplay elements all slot together comfortably, so that even though this game is made of so many different moving parts, they all feel cohesive.

Persona 5 Strikers does have one significant weakness, but it's not really the game's fault. This is a direct sequel to Persona 5, and as such, it's expected that the player has already spent at least 100 hours within the game's setting. Newcomers who only know Joker from Smash will almost certainly be lost at the start.

That said, the game is worth persevering with until you've got the gist of the story and its characters. Switch owners may still clamor for a Persona 5 port, but in the meantime, Persona 5 Strikers is more than a worthy alternative. **— MATTHEW L.**



9.0

How to Excel in Excillant

BRAVELY DEFAULT II

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CLAYTECHWORKS
RATING: T

WHEN SQUARE ENIX first revealed 2014's Bravely Default for the 3DS, social media quickly lit up with mockery over its bizarre name. In retrospect, it does indeed sound like something out of a "radical" ad campaign from the '90s ("It's Bravely Default, dude! You either Brave . . . or you Default!"), but it sure helped the RPG stand out. Bravely Default was a surprise hit, in fact. 2014 was a very grim time for RPGs, especially Japanese RPGs, and Bravely Default reminded the world it's OK to put down grey-and-brown shooters and enjoy some swords, shields and dragon slaying.

Bravely Default roused our slumbering love for retro JRPGs, but while it featured some very strong callbacks to the original Final Fantasy, it exists in a world of its own. Its robust job system combined with highly unique battle mechanics helped Bravely Default garner praise for the bold new ideas it brought to the genre.

Bravely Default's all-new sequel, Bravely Default II, gives us lots, *lots* more of the good stuff Bravely Default fed RPG fans, but it lacks the jolt of originality that shocked us while we wasted away in the '10s. On one hand, it's tempting to hit Bravely Default II with a red mark because it doesn't innovate like its predecessor. On the other hand, what else do we want from Bravely Default II? Its risk-based battle system is still exciting, and it lets you brew up crazy strategies with the help of an ocean-deep Job selection. Yes, Bravely Default II feels very familiar for fans of the series, but once you get over that gripe, your mind is free to submerge itself in a veritable vat of fun that has no match. (Barring the original Bravely Default, of course.)

A vital aside: Note the "II" at the end of Bravely Default II's title. In 2016, we got Bravely Second: End Layer on the 3DS. Bravely Second is a direct follow-up to the first Bravely Default, and not a true sequel. This new Switch release is the official sequel to the first game. Class is over. Gold stars and Asterisks for everyone.

JRPGs are celebrated (and sometimes criticized) for having long, complicated stories, but Bravely Default II is quite light on narrative. Its four main heroes (who are named after musicians; try to place each one) still spend lots of time talking amongst themselves and others on their quest to save the world, but Bravely Default II isn't a story-driven game in the same manner as a Final Fantasy or Persona title. It places a much bigger emphasis on letting you build and rebuild its characters until you have a team that's capable of leveling any threat. If you're the kind of person who loves futzing around with Jobs in Final Fantasy V, welcome home.

Not every job is available at your disposal from minute one of Bravely Default II, of course. When the wayward fisherman Seth washes up on the shores of a strange land, he's a humble Freelancer – a class that lacks any specific strengths or weaknesses. Then the gears of destiny begin grinding, and Seth meets three new friends who put him on the road to collecting "Asterisks." Each Asterisk contains the power of a Job, with the choices ranging from the traditional White Mage and Berserker to the more unusual monster-taming Beastmaster and deadly Hellblade. Most Asterisks are earned the hard way – by struggling against a formidable boss who's all too happy to use the Asterisk themselves and then demonstrate its power by busting your skull open.

The boss fights in Bravely Default II are exciting power struggles that encourage you to make good use of Braving and Defaulting. Yes, there is a method to Bravely Default II's mad name. Every enemy encounter gives you an expected repertoire of JRPG actions – Fight, Item, Run, plus the option to use your Job's unique skillset – but you also have the option to perform multiple actions in one turn ("Brave") or defend and pass on your turn ("Default"). For every turn you choose to Default, you stack up a

Brave Point (BP). You can stack up to four BPs, which grants you some serious flexibility: You can attack an enemy four times, or you can perform some serious resurrection/healing work during a tough fight. You can also apply buffs and debuffs with your extra BP – or you can perform a little bit of everything, like a true multitasking boss.

Ah, but you don't necessarily need a stack of BP points in order to go hog-wild on the battlefield. As with the first Bravely Default, Bravely Default II lets you operate at a deficit of up to minus four BP. This comes in handy when you want to blow through a battle with some weak enemies by whacking the group with your sword or magic four times in a row. If you fail to dispatch your foes in that one turn, however, your character can't act until their BP balance is back up to zero. Taking credit on BP points can absolutely lead to your downfall if you're not careful – but at the same time, working on BP debt is often the only way to get your party back into fighting shape, or to apply vital buffs. Bravely Default II loves to make your heart race while you walk that BP tightrope.

Bravely Default II adds still more depth to its fights with the option to equip permanent skills that you learn from Jobs. For instance, Beastmasters can learn "MP Saver" after gaining a few levels, a boon that you can select and equip on the character even after you change their Job. It goes without saying that MP Saver, which reduces the amount of magic points a character needs to cast a spell, proves of great value if the character switches to a magic-based job like White or Black Mage.

Finally, Bravely Default II lets you equip each character with a secondary Job on top of their main. Secondary Jobs don't grow as the young warriors gain experience, but with a little Job swapping and a touch of level grinding you can wind up with some incredible fighter combos. A heavy tank can double as a healer, or a sword master can really get into the nooks and crannies of a foe's defenses by utilizing attack magic. Bravely Default II doesn't feature an epic cast or a narrative that will knock you off your feet, but fiddling around with its battle system and character creator fills the story void nicely.

Admittedly, Bravely Default II's oddly proportioned character models might make some folks side-eye it. The game utilizes the same aesthetic as its predecessor, i.e. cutesy character models with noggins that might make you think of bobblehead figures or (shudder) Funko Pop dolls. What worked on the 3DS doesn't translate perfectly into the high definition era.

That said, Bravely Default II's costume designs are top-tier. Every character gets their own set of threads for every Job – and rest assured, there are a lot of Jobs in this game. The amount of care and detail that went into designing each outfit is also clear, with visible stitching and varied textures. Bravely Default II might appear a little "last gen" at a glance, but it's a deceptive impression; a lot of work clearly went into its visuals.

A lot of work went into Bravely Default II, period. While it doesn't bring wild new changes to the JRPG genre like the game that started this series, Bravely Default II takes everything that 3DS breakout achieved and then builds layers on top of it. There is a lot of game to get through, here – hours and hours, and then a few more hours once you think you're about to tuck things in.

As for Bravely Default II's seeming lack of innovation, it's worth remembering that the series still has no real equivalent. 2018's Octopath Traveler for the Switch might be regarded as a close cousin, but even that game's divided SaGa-style storyline sets it apart from Bravely Default II's connected narrative.

Bravely Default II is one of the Switch's best RPGs, and that's not small praise for an RPG on a system that's already home to some of the genre's best. It's not a radical hero like Bravely Default – it doesn't carry a guiding light for hungry JRPG fans to flock to, something we desperately needed when it first arrived years ago – but it's thick and hearty and will keep you warm and fed for weeks on end. **– NADIA**

9.0

Take the Reins

MONSTER HUNTER RISE

THE MOST INTIMIDATING enemy in the Monster Hunter series isn't a fire-breathing dragon, a raging feral bear or any kind of frenzied mutant velociraptor – it's the wall of tutorial text standing between you and simply understanding how to even play. Box after box of gameplay system explanations, button command notifications and overlapping quest alerts of seemingly dozens of different kinds assault your senses from the very first minute, and they just don't seem to let up. What's worse, they all fall short of fully explaining anything, leaving you scratching your head when no follow-up is offered later. It makes for a poor first impression. The Monster Hunter learning curve is severe.

Monster Hunter Rise, thankfully, is not quite as unapproachable as past series sequels. My eyes still glazed over somewhere around the 25th different text-only tutorial thrown at me in the first hour alone, but I knew there was a great game lying buried behind all those boxes, so I pushed past, found it, and am glad I did.

This is my first core Monster Hunter experience. I've dabbled with demos of previous entries in the mainline series, but the only real time I've invested in the brand before was with the spin-off Monster Hunter Stories on the 3DS a few years back, and that one didn't play anything like this. Having finally gotten my feet wet with actual Hunting of Monsters, I get it now.

It's just satisfying! The sense of accomplishment you feel after felling a foe in this game is immense, both because the battles take so long to complete and because achieving victory also means you've managed to overcome the complexity of the game's controls and all of the many extra gameplay-influencing side mechanics. You get to the "Quest Complete" screen and you feel real pride in yourself. That's amazing.

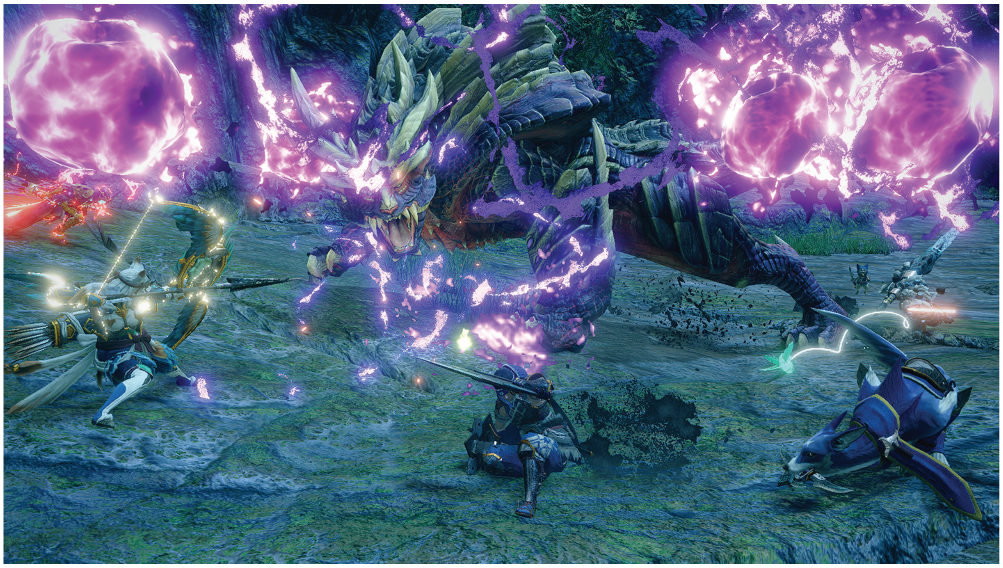
Then you want to do it all again. The gameplay loop here is addicting, too. You play as a newly appointed Hunter living in the quaint and beautiful Kamura Village. You're given a list of monster-hunting or item-gathering quests to accomplish, you pick one, you head out into the wild to achieve the selected objective, you do it and then you return to Kamura, triumphant. It's a cycle that is easy to lose yourself in for hours on end, but also segmented in a way that's pick-up-and-play friendly as well.

Variety keeps things fresh. Rinse-and-repeating quest after quest could end up feeling repetitive, but there are so many variables you can change along the way – like your choice of weapon. By default you're given a fairly basic Long Sword, and it's good for starters. But there are over a dozen other options to experiment with, from the long-range Bows and Bowguns to the heavy smashing Hammer to the wildly aerial Insect Glaive, which lets your hunter fly around the battlefield like a bug.

Perhaps inspired by the fun of wielding that particular weapon in past games, Rise introduces "flying like a bug" to all types of hunters by way of the new Wirebugs. These fierce little fireflies tag along with you on your travels, and at any time you can sling one forward from you and swing on a rope of silk behind it like Spider-Man cruising above the streets of New York City. This being my first real Monster Hunter game, I don't have the past play experience of being without the Wirebug for context, but I can't imagine just trudging around on foot without this enhanced mobility option.

Enhancing mobility must have also been on the developers' minds when they introduced the Palamutes too – large, loyal, saddle-equipped hunting hounds that you can ride for an extra burst of speed whenever your target tries to flee from the fight. Again, it's so great to have my puppy buddy Scout alongside me that I can't picture him not being there – and it's especially nice that your pup pal is constantly attacking enemies too, adding to your overall damage output.

A feline Palico also follows you, for more assistance. And an owl buddy called a Cohoot. Your Hunter owns a zoo. You're basically the Beastmaster.



SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T

And if all those other animal allies aren't enough? You can ride the very monsters you've been sent to hunt! Yet another new gameplay addition here in Rise is the ability to send out strings of Wirebug silk and attach them like reins to the beasts you're battling – then you can hop on top and temporarily control them, using them to attack other nearby monsters or else just commanding them to charge themselves headfirst into a wall in order to keep their HP moving down closer to 0.

Perhaps it's best I waited. All these fresh additions to the formula made just for Rise have helped to give me a better first impression of the overall series than I would've had playing any earlier entry . . . or, well, second impression. Because the oppressive tutorials still stand out in my mind weeks later.

A whole cottage industry has sprung up on YouTube and elsewhere around the Internet to try to fill in the gaps that Rise leaves open in not adequately explaining itself and its systems to newcomers – but if you take advantage of those fan-made resources and put in the time to learn the proper way to handle at least one of the many different kinds of weapons, I think you'll be able to push past that one big problem and start singing the praises of the rest of this package too.

As for me? I've just scratched the surface. I'm taking my time so as to not let myself get overwhelmed by the sheer density of what this game holds, practicing to make perfect just one weapon myself.

(I'm a Light Bowgun guy.)

Lastly, let me wrap things up by saying how impressed I am by Rise on a technical level. The game's gorgeous and never stutters to keep up with the grandiose visuals – Capcom took their time to get this one right, clearly, as it's become one of the most stunning spectacles on the Switch.

I encourage you to see it with your own eyes . . . after they're done being glazed over from the opening text assault, of course.

– LUCAS

9.0

A More Modern Marsupial

CRASH BANDICOOT 4: IT'S ABOUT TIME!

I GOT MY first taste of Bandicoot adventure all the way back in our September/October 2018 issue with the release of Crash Bandicoot: N. Sane Trilogy, a collection of the first three titles in the series, remade, but with close accuracy to the source material.

It was perhaps a little *too* close for my liking, however. In my review, I noted the games' difficulty was brutal, and that "it's the sort of thing that would probably be mitigated by just doing away with the lives system alto-gether," as more modern titles and indie fare, such as Super Meat Boy, have done.

Fast-forward to the here and the now of Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!. The game is still quite difficult indeed, and I wish there were a way to see the current tally of lives lost to the machinations of Nefarious Tropy and his multifaceted mob of minions. But this time, there's a crucial difference.

When you start up the game, you can choose to play it the Retro way, which means you're given a limited number of lives to live, and failure will send you all the way back to the start of the current level, all so you can repeatedly work your way to that one spot that just keeps giving you trouble before everything repeats itself. If that's the kind of challenge that makes you want to hike up your jorts and do a funky dance, then you're all set.

Or you can play it the Modern way. Everything is the same here, from the Bandicoot-bashing traps to the enemy placement, and you're even rewarded the same way for your progression. The one and only difference?

Lives are out the window.

Instead, the game keeps tabs on how many lives you've spent as you traverse each level and battle each boss. And this one simple little thing is a literal game-changer, let me tell you. My patience for throwing myself at a difficult obstacle is extended tremen-dously when I don't have to worry about an abstract, finite resource dwindling with my every failure, and as a result, my enjoyment of the game was multiplied many times over.

Put simply: Failure doesn't feel like a waste of time. My time, specifically; some people dedicate themselves to perfect no-hit, no-death runs of brutal games, and I honestly rather admire them for that. Me? I've got other things to do. Other games to play.

Oh, and the new Shadow Ring that shows your position over the ground while in the air is quite helpful, too.

By all rights, I feel like we could end things there, but there's more to this package to enjoy. Setting it apart from earlier entries are the masks you acquire – or rather, meet, who help you with different abilities, ranging from slowing time to phasing objects in and out of your dimension and more.

But the real standouts are the other characters you can play as. There's former boss Dingodile, one-time mastermind Neo Cortex and the real show-stealer, an alt-universe version of Tawna who uses a spin kick instead of a spin and a grappling hook for items and enemies out of reach. If they made a full game starring her, I'd be first in line for a copy.

Unfortunately, there does come a downside to this lot: Their screen time is extremely limited (maybe paranoia related to long-running complaints about "Sonic and his friends" set in), and their stages usually transition midway to stages you've already beaten, only harder, as you see how they affected something. It's a shame, because they deserve more spotlight as playable characters.

That said, I think Crash Bandicoot 4 is the perfect place for anyone to jump in if they're interested in this brand of marsupial madness. If you like this and want something with a bit of a sharper edge difficulty-wise, then check out the N. Sane Trilogy after. (Oh, if only they'd patched "Modern" into it as an option later. It's not too late to add it now, is it?). **– DAVID**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: TOYS FOR BOB
RATING: E10+

More Blunder Than Wonder

BALAN WONDERWORLD

WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

Balan Wonderworld had so much promise when it was first revealed. Helmed by industry legend Yuji Naka and developed by a new studio named Balan Company that came together specifically for this one project, it seemed like it was set up to succeed. But it doesn't. At all. Its final release, as shipped to stores, feels woefully unfinished, unpolished and unfun.

It's obtuse. I just complained about Monster Hunter Rise's overabundance of tutorial screens a few pages ago, but I gladly would have welcomed a few here – there is just no explanation for core gameplay systems. The very structure of how to progress is left for you to figure out for yourself.

Having played the game for several days, I still don't know the point of some things. Take the hub world: a floating land mass in the sky called the Isle of Tims. The Tims are a small species of chickens (some of which have rabbit ears), and they're constantly make slow progress constructing some kind of elaborate playground structure called the Tower o' Tims in the middle of the island. You can speed their project along by producing more Tims, and you can do that by feeding gemstones to the existing population until one of them gets fat, and then you throw another little Tim at it and it goes back to being small while laying an egg. None of that's explained to the player, and the Tower seems to have no connection to the main game. It may very well be wholly pointless.

The real meat and potatoes of the experience is Mario-ish 3D platforming – except imagine a 3D Mario game in which every one of Mario's default, basic actions is removed from his moveset and separated out to become a separate power-up (or, in this case, costume). Want to perform a ground pound? You have to find the ground pound-enabling pig outfit. Want to be able to climb on a wall? Only a spider suit can handle that. Long jump? You got it – another suit for that.

Your standard hero kid is so incapable that he or she can literally only move and jump – and every single action button on the controller is mapped to jump. A jumps. B jumps. Y and X and ZL and ZR: jump and jump and jump and jump again. You're a jumping fool.

Except sometimes you can't jump! Some power-up costumes, when acquired, remove your ability to jump in order to replace that single action with a different one. The dragon suit, for instance, lets you breathe fire. OK, that's kind of cool. But then you can't jump any more while you wear it, and, what's worse, once you put on any outfit you're not allowed to return to just being the normal, non-costumed kid. There are literally times in this 3D platforming game when you have no jump at all.

It gets worse: Progress is tied to collecting golden Balan statues (also something you have to figure out on your own), and earning many of those is unnecessarily frustrating. Some are awarded if you successfully complete a timing-based minigame in which the top-hatted Balan flies through the sky inexplicably attacking meteors(?) – but if you score anything less than absolutely perfect "Excellent" ratings across the board, you get nothing. Zip. Zilch. Zero. Good day sir!

Other statues are awarded for beating bosses by using a variety of moves, which is kind of a good idea – but again, that isn't explained. So a player's first instinct will likely be the path of least resistance: attacking as simply as possible. And then those big boss battles with their elaborate set-pieces are over in seconds flat. I beat one boss by literally walking the hero around slowly and pressing B exactly three times.

When you get enough statues, Balan appears to take you on a train ride, indicating you might travel to a new place. Nope. The train circles around in the sky above the Isle of Tims and then just sets you right back down in that same spot again. One hit from a foe removes your costume, frequently stranding you. Photo Mode is a joke. I could go on!

Again, what happened here? This game is far too undercooked and should never have shipped in this state. Rushed out the door before the financial year ended, I suppose. It's all a terrible shame, as there really was a spark of promise here. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPERS: BALAN COMPANY & ARZEST RATING: E10+

5.0

The Trail Comes to an End

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL IV

WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER than alone.

That's the best way to sum up the main theme of Nihon Falcom's Trails of Cold Steel games. Few series give you an opportunity to follow a group of characters through the course of four games, watching them grow from plucky and ambitious teenagers to successful and battle-hardened adults who support each other. And few series take a simple but profound theme like this and hammer it home through several meaningful stories.

Trails of Cold Steel IV brings an end to much of series protagonist Rean Schwarzer and his friends in Class VII's journey together, which started in 2013 with Trails of Cold Steel. While these characters will no doubt show up in future Trails games, Trails of Cold Steel IV brings finality, and its success as a game, for me, is mainly based upon how it lands as an ending.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RATING: T

Let me get this out of the way: If you haven't played any of Falcom's Trails series before, do not start with Trails of Cold Steel IV. It is the culmination of eight previous Trails games including three Trails in the Sky games, the non-localized Crossbell duology Zero no Kiseki and Ao no Kiseki, and Trails of Cold Steel I, II and III. At minimum, you should start with Trails of Cold Steel III if you want to get into the series. It released on Switch last year. Also, keep in mind that the more Trails games you play, the more story payoff you'll receive when you do jump into Trails of Cold Steel IV, as it incorporates characters and plot threads from them all.

All that said, Trails of Cold Steel IV provides a worthy conclusion to Class VII's story, and it all starts with the game's opening mission. (Here's your spoiler warning for Trails of Cold Steel III). Trails of Cold Steel IV begins after a massive cliffhanger from the previous game, where we see Rean get captured, a prophetic curse released across the Empire of Erebonia, war declared on the neighboring Republic of Calvard and dark organizations pulling the strings behind the scenes.

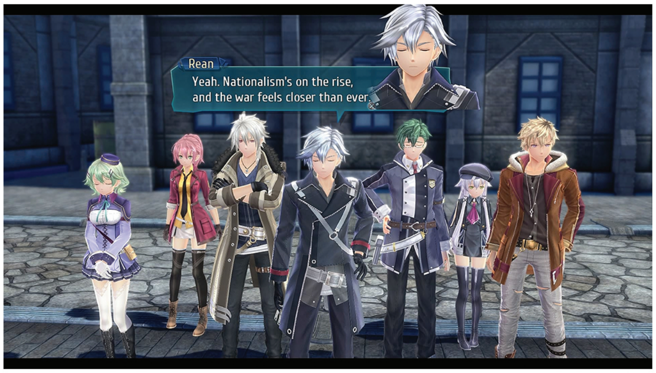
With Rean out of commission, the game puts you into the roles of Estelle Bright from Trails in the Sky and Lloyd Bannings from the Crossbell duology at the start, both of whom are Trails series legends and former protagonists. When they first appeared on the screen, I couldn't contain my excitement! Seeing these heroes return to the spotlight and work together in this new conflict made for a perfect opening to the game and showed the stakes of Erebonia's descent into darkness.

Like this opening, Trails of Cold Steel IV has plenty of strong moments in its story. You get to take part in daring missions, navigate political intrigue and unite Class VII and its allies against an unfathomable force. There's beauty in the smaller moments, too, as you can use bonding points to spend time with friends and develop romance, like in the previous games.

Falcom knows how to write characters and the meaningful relationships they share, and these story moments, both big and small, put this strength on display. I can't tell you how many times I cheered and cried for Rean and the cast while playing, and that's a testament to their writers' talent.

Trails of Cold Steel IV's story suffers in some of the moments in between all this, however. Falcom tries to pack too many storylines from previous Trails games, sidequests and opportunities to revisit locations in between each major mission. The story loses momentum quickly. This is especially apparent in the game's weakest part: its second act, which could've been half as long and still provided what it needed to for the overall narrative.

Trails of Cold Steel IV also sports a few minor tweaks to its deep turn-based combat system and reintroduces some gameplay elements from Trails of Cold Steel II.



Brave Orders, which were introduced in the third game and allow characters to employ specific buffs in battle, return in this entry but are less exploitable. In Trails of Cold Steel III, you could dispatch bosses with ease by using certain combos of Brave Orders, and it lowered the stakes on those fights. Trails of Cold Steel IV remedies this by making enemies more difficult and allowing some to use Disorders – their own version of Brave Orders – that have adverse effects on your party.

Falcom finally achieved a near-perfect difficulty balance in this game compared to its previous Trails of Cold Steel entries. The bosses are tough and fair, and with a large cast at your disposal there are many character builds and strategies to employ when you face them.

Trial Chests and Spirit Shrines from Trails of Cold Steel II make a return in this game. While Spirit Shrines were mainly a plot device to see flashbacks, I enjoyed taking on Trial Chests again. They require you to use a specific combination of characters to fight an enemy after opening the chest. The cast of playable characters in Trails of Cold Steel IV is huge, and since it can be tough to outfit them all, it's easy to pick four and just stick with them as you go. Trial Chests make you test out everyone, and it allows you to see other possibilities in combat.

I experienced a few issues with the Switch port. The most noticeable one occurred in combat during Link Attacks. When you land a critical hit on your enemy, your ally will automatically follow up with an attack. There was often a five-second delay before the characters would load in and attack. I only experienced this issue in Handheld Mode, but it happened often enough where it felt jarring.

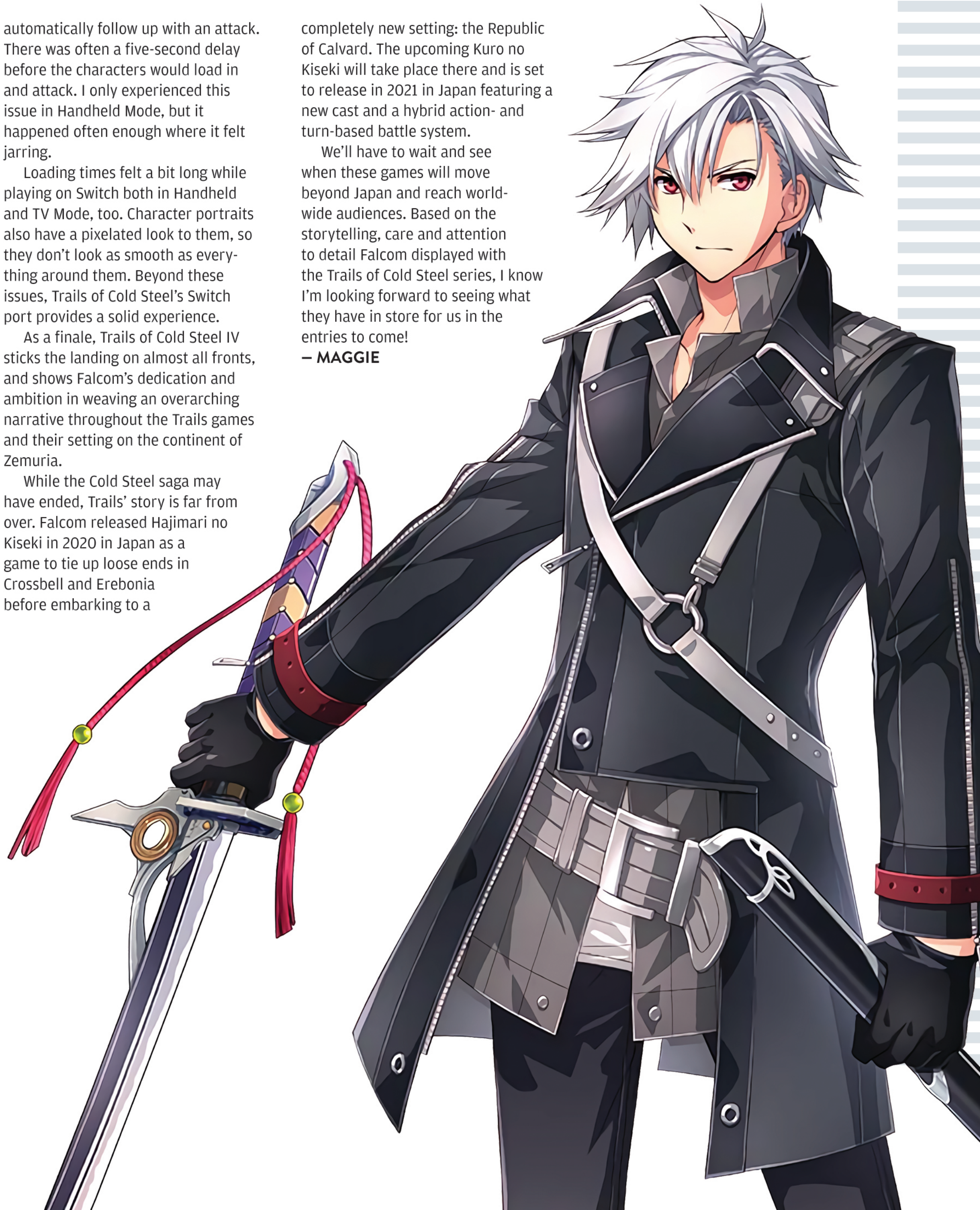
Loading times felt a bit long while playing on Switch both in Handheld and TV Mode, too. Character portraits also have a pixelated look to them, so they don't look as smooth as everything around them. Beyond these issues, Trails of Cold Steel's Switch port provides a solid experience.

As a finale, Trails of Cold Steel IV sticks the landing on almost all fronts, and shows Falcom's dedication and ambition in weaving an overarching narrative throughout the Trails games and their setting on the continent of Zemuria.

While the Cold Steel saga may have ended, Trails' story is far from over. Falcom released Hajimari no Kiseki in 2020 in Japan as a game to tie up loose ends in Crossbell and Erebonia before embarking to a completely new setting: the Republic of Calvard. The upcoming Kuro no Kiseki will take place there and is set to release in 2021 in Japan featuring a new cast and a hybrid action- and turn-based battle system.

We'll have to wait and see when these games will move beyond Japan and reach worldwide audiences. Based on the storytelling, care and attention to detail Falcom displayed with the Trails of Cold Steel series, I know I'm looking forward to seeing what they have in store for us in the entries to come!

– MAGGIE



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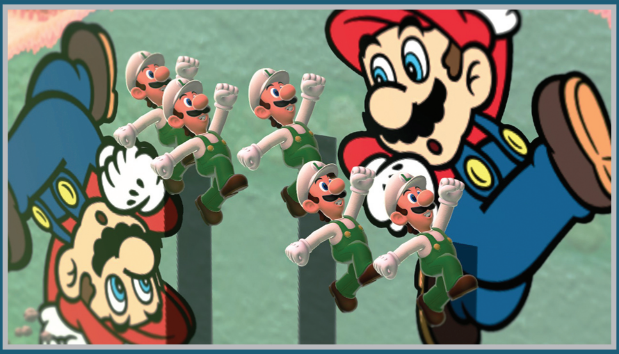
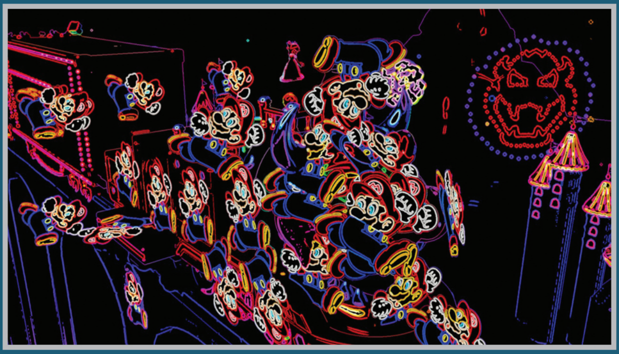




SNAPSHOT MODE REVIEW
SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD + BOWSER'S FURY

KNOWING IN ADVANCE the topic we'd tackle this time, I held off on talking about Snapshot Mode in my review of Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury in our last issue. Here, then, is that evaluation:

It's great!

At just about any time while playing either side of this two-in-one combo game, you can activate Snapshot Mode to instantly freeze the action and call up a virtual camera. You can then move, rotate, tilt and zoom to get the angle your want, apply filters and even slap Stamps on the environments before finally committing to a shot by pressing the Capture Button.

It's just versatile enough, without offering so many options as to feel overwhelming. I love that the Stamps – originally meant to decorate posts to Miiverse in the Wii U version – were repurposed here, as they're actually more fun now. You can scatter a few around or fill the scene with way too many! It's joyful.

Carter helped capture these shots one Saturday, and it was fun to play specifically looking for photo-worthy moments. The only trouble we ran into was remembering to hide the control reminders before pressing Capture – it just saves the screen exactly as-is, so it won't remove such elements automatically! **— LUCAS**

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy – Deluxe Edition	8.5	Brett	#45
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43

3DS

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40

SECOND OPINION
NINTENDO LABO VR KIT

THAT LABO DIDN'T take off more than it did will always be a source of mystery to me. I bought the first three sets for my son and we built every piece of them together, and he's put real time into each and every one, particularly the Robot and Vehicle Kits.

When it came time for the VR Kit, I waited a while to give it to him since he was having so much fun with the others, so it's still pretty new in our house. I'm glad I waited, because this thing is nuts!

Obviously, there are some serious limitations here: The Switch's screen just doesn't display in a high enough resolution to make this the most immersive VR experience. That said, the 3D effect is still quite impressive, and it tracks your movements flawlessly.

The first thing we built after the VR Goggles themselves was the Labo Toy-Con Camera. The two games you can play with it actually harken back to the Variety Kit, so I'm glad we built them in order. The first is honestly the most impressive, which is the aquarium. You basically just look around and try to snap interesting pictures of fish, but it's quite beautiful and oddly addictive. The second one involves an adorable fluff ball thing, and you snap pictures of him doing various activities in his house.

As of this writing we're halfway through building the Elephant, and while we have slowed down on our building a bit, Labo continues to come up a lot in Randazzo family conversations. A big question I still hear from parents is whether or not these kits are worth the price considering the games themselves aren't very deep. In my experience, every one of them has paid themselves off in full. The VR Kit in particular is a remarkable piece of innovation, and it's sure to be a hit with the younger Nintendo fans in your life! (Ages 7 and up, that is. Eye safety.) **– KRIS**

9.0 LUCAS

8.5 KRIS

PERIPHERAL MODDING

GAME BOY CAMERA XL

This version probably isn't going to fit into your pocket.

OK, SO WE retrospectivized the Game Boy Camera back in the Retro section already, but only lightly touched on what the hobbyist community has achieved with the world's first selfie shooter in the 23 years since its launch. Here, then, please take a look at one of the pinnacles that's been reached in recent years: an insane – but entirely functional – mod that attached a standard Game Boy Camera unit to a comparatively massive Canon EF lens.

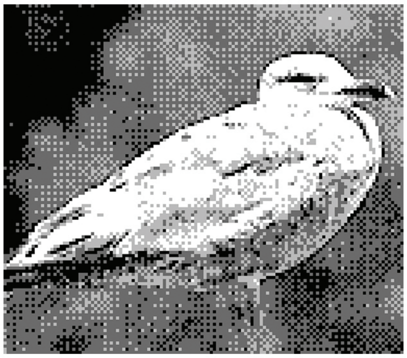
Why fuse together woefully underpowered '90s digital camera tech with the kind of massive lens you'd normally only see used by nature photographers at National Geographic or courtside at an NBA game? Why not! The result is absolutely ridiculous to look at, but apparently a ton of fun to use.

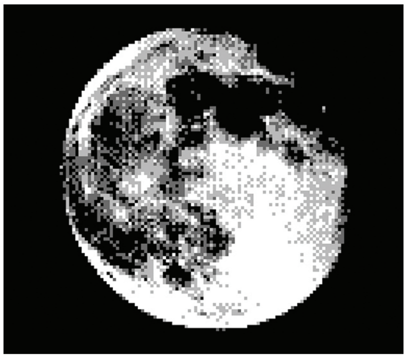
This modification was the brainchild of one Bastiaan Ekeler, and it first went viral when he posted the above image and an explanation of the process he underwent to create it on his personal website. It's essentially just a cone-shaped 3D-printed adapter made to connect the two pieces of hardware together, and it makes for a Game Boy Camera with an out-of-this-world zooming ability.

Literally – Bastiaan was able to use this creation to photograph the moon! By default, a Game Boy Camera struggles to focus on objects just a few feet away. This is quite an upgrade!

Bastiaan's Frankenstein Zoom Lens made the rounds through the Nintendo fandom in 2018, and in the years since the community of enduring Game Boy Camera aficionados have been galvanized to push its humble hardware even further. Another creator figured out a way to add color to Game Boy Camera photos by using a series of colored films over the lens, then combining the tones later. Others have turned to A.I. upscaling tech to take the tiny 128x112 resolution images and make them look a little more normal. What will they think of next? I can't wait to see! **— LUCAS**

Ekeler.com





FAN-MADE PROOF OF CONCEPT

Mother Reimagined

A gorgeous glimpse at what a series revival could look like!

EVERY GAME IN the Mother/EarthBound series has its strengths. EarthBound Beginnings is the most primitive of the trio, but it does the best job at giving players a clean vessel to fill with their own thoughts and feelings. Like a good photograph, it doesn't need motion to inspire you. It's largely still, allowing your imagination to bring it to life.

One fan, Ezequiel Nieto, took a break from developing his own games at Argentina's Pizia studio to do just that, depicting the leads of EarthBound Beginnings in a quiet moment between battles against possessed lamps and rampaging aliens. The only one in the group who may have actually looked at the camera and said "Fuzzy Pickles!" is Ninten, while Ana looks on at him, adoringly. Big bruiser Teddy proves he's an equally big snoozer as Lloyd considers what kind of person could catch a nap in broad daylight – and during a global panic, no less!

These lovingly built portraits take cues from Nintendo's original EarthBound clay-based artwork and Fangamer's amazing homegrown sculptures that were released alongside the fabled Mother 3 fan translation patch. In that context, it's easy to imagine the Mother/EarthBound franchise making a comeback with a similar style. The remake of Link's Awakening turned heads with its toy-like graphics, and Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl are also adopting a chibi look. Why couldn't the same thing work for the RPG series that served as a precursor to them both? And that's not even mentioning the 30,000,000+ folks who bought Animal Crossing: New Horizons. I wonder how many of them would be willing to take the plunge on a game that could look even cuter, where you not only converse with the animals, but also battle them with a butter knife if they get too wild?

Creator Shigesato Itoi has sworn that the series is over, but history has shown that you never know where Ness, Lucas, Ninten and friends may go next, officially or otherwise. **– JONATHAN**

@Elk_sign

FAN-MADE PIKMIN SEQUEL

Pikmin: New Fortune

A first look at an amazingly ambitious new Pikmin adventure!

MR. MIYAMOTO MUST not be much of a gardener. How could he be, when his promise to produce Pikmin 4 has not yet born fruit, nearly six years after he first revealed it was in development? His lack of a green thumb isn't stopping other budding Pikmin makers, though. In fact, the long delay of the next official sequel may very well have fertilized fan creators further!

I'm always amazed at the enterprising spirit of fangame developers, whether they've bringing brand-new Mega Man adventures into existence or putting their own spin on Mario's Mushroom Kingdom. But I'll admit that I've been fully taken aback to realize that there's actually a thriving community of fangame creators working on the Pikmin franchise! For some reason, it's only ever made sense to my mind to see fangames play out in 2D – starting from the baseline of the NES or SNES eras doesn't seem too intimidating to tackle. But with Pikmin, the series' foundation was laid on the GameCube! That's a wildly more complicated starting point, right? Yet, these creators are undeterred.

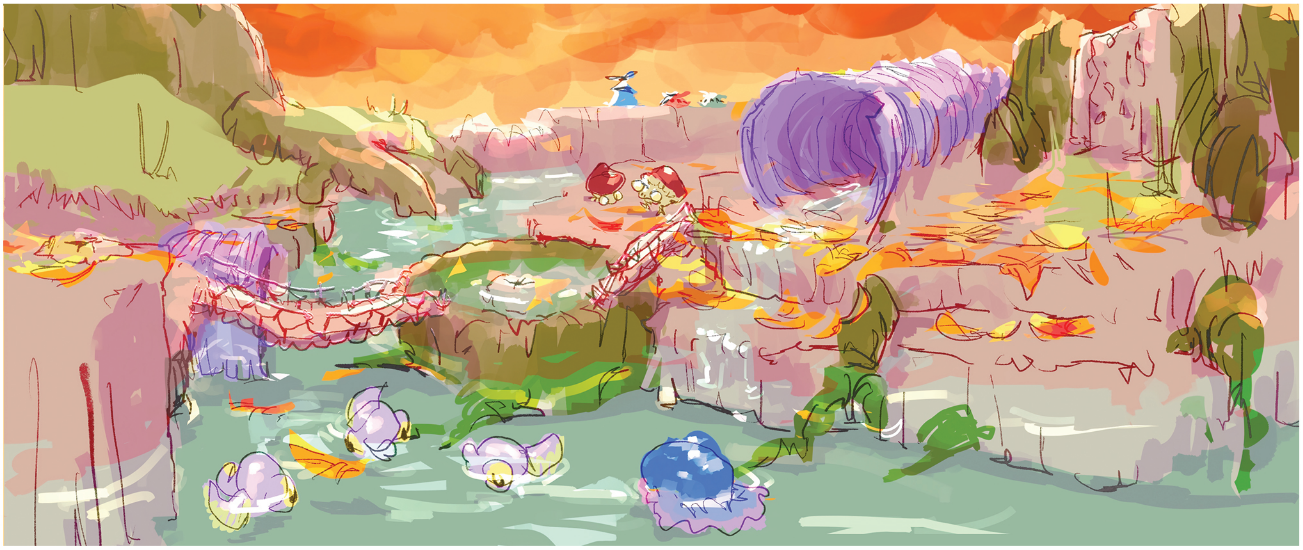
A recent fan-produced "Pikmin Direct" showcased several upcoming Pikmin fan projects, but the one that most caught my eye was the ambitious Pikmin: New Fortune. An overhaul/mod of Pikmin 2, it introduces a new hero, Jeepers, as Captain Olimar's partner on a new mission to Planet PNF-404. The story follows the conclusion of Pikmin 3, when the Hocotate Freight company President once again commands Olimar to return to the Pikmin's world and rescue Louie. Again!

On this expedition, though, Olimar and Jeepers will encounter lots of never-before-seen creatures – including three new varieties of Pikmin! Lead Pikmin have uncrushable metal bodies, Earth Pikmin have thorny heads that let them deal extra damage in battle and Breadmin live inside Breadbug hosts and have excellent treasure-carrying and digging skills.

Pikmin: New Fortune has no release date yet, but you can follow the project's progress on Discord or Twitter. And what a fine handle: @PikminNF! **– LUCAS**

Discord.gg/Pikmin

@PikminNF



ARTWORK BY JASON LUPAS

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEXT ISSUE

Ten years after the 2003 release of **The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker** on the GameCube, we got **The Wind Waker HD** on Wii U in 2013. Ten years after the 2006 release of **The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** on both GameCube and Wii, we got **Twilight Princess HD** on Wii U in 2016. Nintendo sometimes subverts expectations, and patterns don't always lead to accurate predictions. But, in this case, the trend is planned to continue perfectly predictably: **The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword** first launched on Wii in 2011, and now, 10 years later, the all-new **Skyward Sword HD** is set to soar on Switch this summer.

In the next edition of NF, we'll revisit the highest highs and lowest lows of what has become one of the most polarizing Zelda series sequels. We'll also look ahead to the promise of what's coming next for the now 35-year-old Zelda brand, take flight with Supergirl and her friends in **DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power**, and much, much more!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #53:

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD HD

MARIO GOLF: SUPER RUSH

MIITOPIA

NEW POKÉMON SNAP

NO MORE HEROES III

DC SUPER HERO GIRLS: TEEN POWER

FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB: THE MISSING HEIR

FAMICOM DETECTIVE CLUB: THE GIRL WHO STANDS BEHIND

POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND & SHINING PEARL

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD 2

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE FIGHTERS PASS VOL. 2 **CONTINUED!**

AND MUCH **MORE!**

JULY/ AUGUST 2021

NF PHOTO CHALLENGE!

WHILE TRAVEL IN general remains difficult over a year into the ongoing pandemic, the summer months are upon us once again nevertheless and you may be planning a safe and responsible way to give yourself a change of scenery. If that's the case, why not take an NF issue along wherever you go?

In the past we've received a few photo submissions from readers who've taken our issues to interesting places or presented them to famous individuals — so as this photography-themed edition comes to a close, how about we make that an official challenge? Take your favorite copy of our magazine with you to the top of a mountain. Or to see an exotic animal at a zoo. Or to the Lincoln Memorial! Just pick some place that's unique and fun, then photograph yourself or a friend or family member holding NF there. We'd love to see where our issues could end up!

When the moment's been captured, tweet the photo to us by tagging **@NintendoForce** on Twitter, or email a copy to us using the **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** email address. We'll print the best in an upcoming issue! **— LUCAS**

Three out of four looking at the camera is pretty good. Cooper was just too intrigued by Zamazenta!

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